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DELL BOOK 524

Once in Vienna

He Had Three Love Affairs

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

by VICKI BAUM

author of GRAND HOTEL

HE SANG HIS WAY INTO WOMEN'S HEARTS

ONCE IN VIENNA

By VICKI BAUM

Author of
"Grand Hotel"
"Tale of Bali"
"The Ship and the Shore"

Translated from the original by
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DELL PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.

George T. Delacorte, Jr.
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Vice-President

261 Fifth Avenue

Printed in U.S.A.

New York 16, N. Y.

DESIGNED AND PRODUCED BY WESTERN PRINTING & LITHOGRAPHING COMPANY

ONCE IN VIENNA

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Striding his lusty way into the hearts of women, living life as it comes to him, Rassiem of the golden voice lacks nothing but the one woman he truly loves, his divorced wife, the glittering Kouczowska. She loves him, but values her career more than life with the handsome tenor. For solace he turns to two of the girls who are his for the asking: lovely Dima, who stirs his senses, and gentle Elisabeth, whose innocence soothes his longing. Amid the glory and glamour that was once Vienna, the life of these four, each loving in a different way, becomes a thing of torment and ecstasy, heartache and passion, until each works out his destiny.

Persons in the *Novel* "Once in Vienna"—

HANNES RASSIEM,
handsome and famous, is the leading tenor of Vienna's Royal Opera. He also teaches at the Conservatory, where his students worship him and the girls regularly fall in love with him. Passionate and self-centered, the one important thing in his life is to be able to sing. Nothing else really touches him except his deep, gnawing love for his divorced wife.

MARIA KOUCZOWSKA,
Rassiem's former wife and a brilliant opera star herself, is a vivid and commanding personality both on and off the stage. She is still in love with Rassiem, but the theater is the very breath of life to her, more important to her than marriage.

DIMA DIMATTER,
one of Rassiem's students, a lovely girl with a beautiful soprano voice, is tall and slender and just blossoming into ardent woman-

(Continued on next page)

Persons in the *Novel* "Once in Vienna"—

(Continued from preceding page)

hood. The love-child of a ballet dancer and an aristocrat father, she carries herself proudly; and she knows (or thinks she knows) just what she wants from life.

ELISABETH KERCKHOFF,

another of Rassiem's students and Dima's closest friend, is a shy, intense, and very lonely girl whose family is well-to-do. Her home life is pathetically unhappy, and her only joy is in music, which is like a fever in her blood, and in her worship of Rassiem.

WILHELM GELFIUS,

the chorus master at the Conservatory, is a thin, ugly, ironical man who has lifted himself above a sordid past. He has in him elements of greatness—and a silent, hopeless love for the gentle and dreamy Elisabeth.

SOPHIE DIMATTER,

a ballet dancer at the Royal Opera, is Dima's unwed mother. Small, plump, and still rosily youthful, she prefers to be known as her daughter's sister.

GUSTI DIMATTER,

Sophie's other daughter, sings in the chorus at the Opera. Her father, according to Sophie, is the property master at the theater, but he stoutly denies it and contributes nothing to Gusti's support.

EDWARD EDLINGER,

a stolid, broad, red-cheeked musician at the Opera, is Gusti's betrothed. He is not as exciting as she would sometimes like him to be, but he is certainly respectable.

FRAU KERCKHOFF,

Elisabeth's mother, is a small, frail, wasted woman. She is slowly dying from an incurable disease.

PROFESSOR KERCKHOFF,

Elisabeth's father, cannot bear to look at his sick wife. He shuts himself up in his studio and works away at an endless succession of huge and superficial sculptures.

BERGER,

Rassiem's good-natured valet, is never surprised by anything his master does and looks after him in a series of little explosions of willing and eager service.

DOCTOR BAYER,

the physician attached to the Royal Opera, is a shrewd, kindly man who sometimes has problems with his temperamental patients that go far beyond the merely physical.

COUNT SCHEIBBS-MONTI,

Dima's father and a Minister in the government, is a charming and wealthy old gentleman. Once a year Sophie presents her daughter to him and he discreetly presents her with a sum of money.

Once in Vienna

Chapter One: THE YEARNING HEART

THE DOOR INTO THE SCHOOL CORRIDOR burst open and Hannes Rassiem strode past the two girls without seeing them, swept past them with his long stage strides, and disappeared into the classroom at the end of the corridor where the last singing, yellow gas jet burned. The two doors slammed behind him, first the heavy passage door, with its harsh, noisy slam and then, with a crisp click, the green padded door of the classroom. For a moment there hung in the air the scent of Eau-de-Cologne, cigarettes, and a fresh-smelling English soap. The two girls smiled without realizing it. They were sitting on the window ledge, swinging their legs. Dima was thinking how slender Elisabeth Kerckhoff's ankles were, and wondering whether this was really beautiful; while Elisabeth was pretending to stare over her shoulder out of the window, which looked on to nothing but a gray, blank wall. In reality she was listening to the strange sweet way in which her heart had started to beat when Hannes Rassiem passed. It was for this very reason that after a little while she said derisively, "He's getting fat, isn't he?"

"That comes of being an operatic tenor!"

"And old into the bargain."

"Besides, you know, Elis, all that gadding about and drinking—that's enough to make anyone look a bit bloated."

Elis sidled up closer and nodded anxiously. "Do you think he really does lead such a fast life, Dima?"

"Oh! My sister could tell you a thing or two about him!"

Dima assured her. "It's the talk of the whole theater. But I couldn't tell you, little one," she said. "You might be shocked," and her teeth gleamed white between her hard, vivid, red lips.

"My dear Dima, I'm not in the least interested in your stories."

"No?"

"No," said Elis, a faint smile gleaming in her eyes. "I make up my own stories about him, which are much worse than your sister's theater gossip. And that's much more fun."

At this they both stared out of the window, with eyes that did not see that there was only a gray wall outside, and a gloomy, tiny square of sky shutting in the small courtyard like the lid of a box.

The damp, warm air hung heavily in the passage where it was always dark. For all their humming, the gas jets shed very little light. They lined the corridor like small yellow balls, threaded on a string. Girls were lounging on benches against the wall, whispering excitedly in gay, vivid groups. But the members of the Conservatoire strolled ostentatiously up and down the corridor, clad in peculiar garments, busily devouring sandwiches. In a corner where there was no light whatever, sat Frau Gibich, the supervisor, knitting. As she came to the end of each row she peered eagerly over the tops of her spectacles along the length of the corridor looking for any signs of unseemly behavior. And then she scratched her head with her knitting-needle, for she wore a stiff, faded-blond false plait coiled round her brow, and it irritated her scalp.

"And now the Kouczowska's divorced him," said Dima, at the tail end of a long train of thought. "She wouldn't have left him for nothing, Elis. Such an artiste too! Such a wonderful creature! A born aristocrat."

But Elis did not answer. It was so lovely just to sit there

painting pictures, extravagant, daring pictures, in the cracks and holes of the gray wall: castles in the depths of woods, and castles with steps leading straight into the sea; and spacious meadows with a solitary birch tree growing on them; men and women, women in long trailing garments, and young girls dancing in veils, and others too—others that lay naked, waiting. But the men were all clad in armor, with closed visors; or they might have bare arms —like Siegfried . . .

"Why weren't you at *Siegfried* yesterday?" asked Elis, turning back to the corridor.

"I'd no money."

Dima gripped her handkerchief between her teeth and tugged at it, the muscles at her temples contracting. "Come on, it's time for our lesson."

Music poured from every green door which they passed. Walls, floor, and ceiling resounded with it. Voices penetrated from everywhere—the voices of people, violins, flutes, and pianos; and from somewhere or other the deep notes of an organ.

"Listen, there's the Lukas singing," said Elis stopping at a door.

"Oh, the darling! How clever she is! But she will never be able to take high notes!" said Dima, listening with puckered brow and smoothing her blouse before opening the door.

"Isn't it just like going to the dentist?" asked Elis. "That green door and every time the same feeling of fear—"

"Fear? Rubbish!" said Dima. There was something poised and expectant about her tall, slender body as she entered the room.

Hannes Rassiem was leaning, large and decorative, against the stove. His flowing tie was perfection itself. His hands were clasped behind his back and he stood bent forward a little, so that his fair hair fell across his brow. At

the piano sat Wilhelm Gelfius, the chorus master, thin, ugly, and ironical. Beside him stood a pretty young girl, singing in a crystal-clear voice an old Italian aria, at once simple and complicated. Rassiem had fixed his deeply set, pale eyes with their sparkling black pupils on hers and was holding her voice. As Dima brushed past him with a soft greeting, his attention wandered from the girl, whose singing immediately became uncertain. Elis noticed a twinkle in her friend's eyes, and Rassiem said, "The high notes were bad—with *piangi* you must begin high and place it forward: *piangi—piangi—*" He sang it softly, fixing his eyes once more on Fräulein Lukas. Whereupon all went well again.

It was Dima's turn next. She laid her music on the piano, and once again her hands, her eyes, her body had the same strangely poised expectant look that they had had as she stood outside the door. Elis noticed it and looked at her own hands, lying before her trembling slightly and so irresolute. *Dearest Dima,* she thought, and felt like crying because Dima was a head taller than she was, because she had such a beautiful soprano voice, and knew what she wanted; and because Hannes Rassiem was standing close beside her holding her hands as she sang. Dima finished and was praised. "But you must do your breathing exercises," Rassiem added, "so that you get broader here." His long hand rested for a moment on Dima's shoulders and slid across her chest. Her eyes gazed fixedly past him while he professionally tested her breadth. But the feel of that soft, fresh warmth remained in his fingers for some time. Even while Elis was singing he looked at Dima, noticing for the first time that she was really rather pretty—this overgrown Dimatter: a little ungainly and immature as yet, it was true, but pretty, almost beautiful with her dark unruly hair, with those frank eyes in that brown face and the strangely hard mouth. Mean-

while Elis had finished without his even noticing how badly she had sung and that was the cruelest part of all. "He doesn't even listen to me, Dima—" she said helplessly as they walked downstairs behind Rassiem; but Dima did not answer. "Don't catch cold!" he commanded as they entered the cold hall. "And you'll not forget your breathing exercises, will you?" he added, already in the street, looking at Dima with a strange, intimate smile in his eyes. Then he shook hands with them both and walked rapidly away with his swinging strides; and, smiling, they watched him grow smaller and smaller and finally disappear.

"Well, it's all over again now," said Elis, her head drooping. "Now there's nothing to do but wait and wait—"

"Three days, Elis; shall we be able to survive as long as that?"

"We are idiots! I'm fully aware of that. But I'll tell you something: you—you have—you're even crazier about him than I am!"

"What a clever girl!" said Dima, laughing. But all the same, she suddenly threw her music case into the air and shouted with glee, "Crazy! Marvelously crazy. And happy! Gloriously happy!"

A dignified old gentleman beneath an umbrella was quite startled and turned round angrily. Elis laughed, and Dima sang along behind him, "Do your breathing exercises, breathe—breathe—breathing exercises!"

"Good-by, you stupid, you utterly ridiculous infant!" said Elis. "God bless you."

It hurt a little to watch her dear, beloved Dima, going along so proudly, head erect, with her mass of curls dark against her temples. It hurt to think of her going home now to do her breathing exercises, so happy that she must shout it to the world. A gray sky and a heavy atmosphere, tasting of smoke and soot, hung over everything. In every face that she passed Elis saw meanness and commonness.

And now a sleety snow started to fall. *It all looks so old and faded,* she thought; *it really isn't worth looking at.*

She walked through the crowds, a stranger, painfully sensitive, with a horror of reality in her large eyes, and her head always a little bowed on its slender, white, childish neck.

You darling, thought Elis of Dima, *to be so young as you are! But I am tired, tired, tired to death.* Still she was laughing at herself as she thought it and said softly, "A pose! I'm being sentimental. It won't do." And even in that she detected the tinge of untruth.

Elisabeth Kerckhoff was just seventeen years old.

She bought a gay bunch of anemones for Mamma, and as she entered the hall of the house, she lingered. It was always cold there, and it had a musty smell. A shudder of fear enveloped her on the shabby stairs. Quickly Elis ran through the large rooms, in which the heavy antique furniture standing against the walls seemed to be awaiting an unwelcome guest. She hesitated again at the door of Mamma's room, and then thought scornfully, *Why must I hesitate on the threshold of every door? What is there to be afraid of?* Mamma looked up at her with wide-open eyes, and lifted a small, shrunken hand helplessly from the coverlet. "Flowers?" she asked and tried to smile, but she was not really pleased. Her small, frail body was ill, paralyzed, dying; only the eyes were alive and full of torment. And behind the deep-blue door curtains a shadow was always waiting, like an old friend. Elis kissed Mamma's hands and said how well Mamma was looking today, and that she must surely be quite free from pain, or at least only suffering very little. And that morphia would not be necessary today. And that she had sung well and been praised. As she said this, she lowered her eyes.

"Is Papa at home? Isn't he coming down today? Oh,

never mind; it's better as it is—" said Mamma with a faint flush.

For Professor Kerckhoff could not bear to see his sick wife. He spent all day upstairs in his studio, working in a streaming, dazzling glare of light with naked human limbs before him on the model's throne. He did not think; all that he saw, all that he wanted to feel, was the cold, wet, pliable clay beneath his fingers. The sculptures grew and towered about him in his large studio, filling every corner, standing covered in dust in neighboring attics and even pushing their way out onto the staircase. There were men exhibiting their strong, swelling muscles, men fighting and being thrown to the ground, men wounded, men twisting about, men embracing women; there were huge mothers with massive unyielding breasts and powerful thighs gazing down at themselves with stony eyes—and of all these prolific sculptures there was not one that was more than superficial. They were weak, without strength.

Elis had her meal with her mother, and then slowly went upstairs to her father's studio. And before this door, too, she stood still, smiling quietly at herself. A naked wrestler lay beside the door. Elis leaned against the wall and looked beneath lowered lids at this large figure. His shoulders were broad, the knotted muscles played about his ribs, his hips were small, his thighs long and beautiful, his legs braced . . .

Suddenly Elis was ashamed of herself, and the blood rushed turbulently to her face. A pulse was throbbing in her throat. She turned and went down again, a curious singing in her blood.

A thin green light filtered through the shutters of Mamma's room, painting stripes on the ceiling. Mamma was moving her head regularly from side to side, moaning, "Morphia . . ."

Elis took the syringe from the drawer, and as she pushed

the needle into Mamma's thin white arm, she was overcome by a swaying, drunken giddiness. There was such a lot of tiny, red pricks there already.

Mamma became quiet, and her eyelids closed. "Thank you, dear," she murmured. Elis looked at the beloved face, from which all expression slowly faded. It became satisfied, full of an ugly, drowsy satisfaction. At last Mamma slept.

Elis went down the long, dark passage to her room, in which she started to walk to and fro. On the piano stood Rassiem's photograph, smiling effectively. She stood still and in her thoughts addressed an ironical speech to him. *Don't you start imagining things,* she said, *It's only a joke. Why should you, you of all people, mean so much to me? A tenor, an idiot who will very soon be fat. A good-for-nothing, a drinker. How could you possibly imagine that I was in love with you? Nonsense! It's only because everything else is so empty, and this is so very sweet . . .*

She opened the piano and began to practice. She had a small, delicate voice, all too easily tired. "Only scales now!" said Elis, looking beseechingly into the eyes of the photograph. "Really, only scales, and not more than an hour!" The picture smiled assent, and she began to sing. But it was so dull singing nothing but *AH—EE—OH!* It made one tired and miserable. It was as dreary as everything else, and that was just what it must not be—old and colorless. Elis withdrew slowly into herself; she pushed the book of music carelessly from the piano and was silent. The early twilight stole through the room, making things look unreal and indistinct. Elis listened to herself. Snow was beating against the window panes outside, making the silence within more intense and full of enchantment.

And then she began to sing Schubert.

She sang from memory, with bowed head and closed

eyes—her hands moving of their own accord along familiar paths. This singing to which no one was listening was like a forbidden ecstasy in the darkness. Elis, with closed eyes, penetrated into the music as into a wood, deeper and deeper. The melodies went astray, became confused, and then there were no longer any words, but only one word *—you—you—you—*

There was a knock at the door. Elis was startled. It had become quite dark. She must have been singing for hours. Her father opened the door and stood hesitating on the threshold.

He waited a little while, rubbing his hand nervously against the woodwork of the door, making a mournful, irritating sound.

"Are you going to Mother when she wakes, Elis?"

"Yes, Father."

"I—Elis—I can't, I can't bear to see it."

"No, Father. Of course not," she said. She spoke very softly, in a dry, prim, expressionless voice. And when the door had closed, she looked into the eyes of the photograph and whispered inaudibly, "Now I have sung too much, my dear. And I am hoarse—once again—dearest!"

There were tears and a great fear in her eyes.

Later she went to Mamma, who was lying half-asleep, moaning gently. Elis prepared to play the role of night nurse. Her head aching and filled with ceaselessly revolving thoughts, she huddled herself on the long Empire sofa near the window. Slowly the endless problems that she could not solve gave way to sleep in the soft noises of the evening beneath the green light of the sickroom lamp. Much later, Father's heavy tread sounded on the stairs and then the house was dumb in the drizzling rain. Her head ached and ached.

It began with a ball, which was hot and far too large, trying to force its way from the nape of her neck to her

head, but each time it slipped back, only to force its way forward again. This gave her such intense pain that it made her grit her teeth, but it came back again and again, came back with the throb of her blood. She shivered. She clenched her hands; she could not force her teeth apart; her mind was a turmoil of thoughts, which overwhelmed her with waves of sounds, rhythms, tunes. She lay like this for a long time, with green and black and piercing orange dancing before her closed eyes. And then she became aware of Mamma's voice and forced herself to consciousness.

"Elis, do you know—if Father—is at home?" Mamma asked, staring past her in the green light.

"I expect so, Mamma. What do you want? Don't you feel well?" and, frightened: "Are you cold?" For Mamma was smiling strangely, as though the dangerous feverish shivering were coming.

"Father isn't asleep," said Mamma. "He's not asleep. I can hear his footsteps. I've been listening to him for a long time. He is walking to and fro, to and fro. Listen!"

Mortar rattled in the old walls. A little clock ticked hurriedly. Mamma's eyes were wide open and beseeching.

"Shall I fetch Father?"

Mamma nodded, happy and yet ashamed.

Elis went up the breathing stillness of the stairs to the studio; the ball still rolling painfully round her head. Somewhere a deep chime sounded. Elis was startled by the wrestler beside the door, who seemed to be alive and to move in the flickering light of her candle. Quietly she opened the door, and shrank from the harsh light which enveloped her.

Beneath the reflector stood the white, dead plaster figure of a woman. Beside it, more alive, the same figure in stone. This second figure was as yet only partially revealed and here and there bore deep scars which showed how much the chisel had still to take away. Professor

Kerckhoff was sitting staring at these two gigantic women. There was a great fear in his eyes.

"Father—!" said Elis gently. She felt so very near to him at that moment. He started up.

"What's the matter? Is she dying, Elis?"

"No, I don't think so. You had better come down now; she wants to see you. You must come."

"Must I—?" he said uncertainly. "I'm coming, I'm coming." And at the door he added hesitantly, "How does she look, Elis?"

He turned the light out, still hesitating at the door. *Dear Father,* thought Elis tenderly as she lighted him down the stairs. She looked with compassion at the broad, muscular, white-dusted hands, that were clenched with fear. As he entered, Mamma smiled almost unconsciously.

Elis carefully closed the door behind him. After this she stood at the window of her room, stood waiting and listening until the morning, waiting for something to happen, something unheard of, something impossible.

But Mamma did not die that night.

Chapter Two: WHAT IS IT LIKE—LOVE?

FRÄULEIN SOPHIE DIMATTER, ballet dancer in the third quadrille at the Royal Opera, a small, plump, rosily youthful creature, with brilliants in her ears—such was Dima's mother. Her father was Graf Scheibbs-Monti, lately appointed a minister, a charming old gentleman, to whom she was presented once a year. On these occasions he addressed her, as well as her mother, as "Dear Fräulein," and presented them discreetly and quietly with a 100 kronen note, which Fräulein Sophie took charge of and added to her capital. References to this capital abounded in the sermons which Fräulein Sophie preached to her daughters. It was composed of settlements made on Fräulein

Sophie in her youth by good friends, and ultimately it was to be shared between her two daughters to pave the way to brilliant careers for both of them. Gusti Dimatter, who was in the chorus at the Opera, would benefit considerably by this arrangement. Her father was simply Herr Kruschina, the property master, though he stoutly denied it, and he was not in the least disposed to make any provision for her.

The Dimatters lived in the Freihaus, a huge old building, which was like a little world of its own with its countless courtyards, stairways and passages. The house stood in the midst of the noise of the central market and was inhabited by humble people who lived and died there. The sunny angles of the courtyards were filled with small, neat gardens; red lights burned in dark corners before gentle Madonnas, and there was even a small chapel to which Fräulein Sophie often went to pray.

It was still dark when Dima awoke on these dull winter mornings. The little windows stood out sharp and gray against the blackness of the room, and the pale, starless sky seemed to be quite close behind them. Dima listened to the sirens, which were summoning people to the factories somewhere in the distance. There were high voices and low voices among them, and one which was always the last screamed shrilly and urgently. Dima had christened this one, with malicious amusement, "Fräulein Lukas," and when it ceased it was nearly time to get up. Dima turned over in her warm bed and stretched one arm into the room, where it was cold and slowly growing lighter. *Her top notes will never be good,* she thought, pleasantly excited by the siren. She closed her eyes once more and tried to recapture her last dream, which had been about the sea, wide and dark, slanting beneath a red-painted theatrical sky; and he—oh, yes, Hannes Rassiem had figured in the dream—had said something unintelligible, but

something that had none the less made her happy.

But now the grinding of the coffee mill could be heard from the kitchen, and broken snatches of a Bohemian song, sung by the slovenly little maid, while the fire in the range was beginning to crackle cheerfully. Dima jumped out of bed in one bound, and let the cold air bathe her like water. In the next room Gusti and her mother were having their regular early morning squabble in the course of which Fräulein Sophie warmly recommended the value of virtue, for she was a woman of principle.

"If a girl can't manage on her salary and is at her wit's end, and carries on an affair for the sake of the money, that's another matter," she said. "But if there's no necessity and she does it just for the love of it, then she's a slut." But Gusti, who was in love with the professional musician Edlinger, resentfully questioned her mother's ethics, and reminded her unkindly of Herr Kruschina, whose assistance Fräulein Sophie had not required. "Besides," she stormed, "Edlinger is going to marry me!" At which stage the door of Dima's room burst open to admit both ladies.

"Did you ever see such nonsense," muttered Gusti to herself at the sight of Dima, who did not interrupt her gymnastic exercises.

"Let her be—at least she knows what she wants!" said Fräulein Sophie. With this they both disappeared through the other door into the kitchen, to their breakfasts, during which each day they regularly made friends again.

Dima stopped her bending exercises, and, thoughtful and motionless, stared into the flame of the small candle which stood on the table. *What do I want?* she wondered, and pictures appeared in the candle-flame: To be standing on the stage, in the glare of the footlights, which is so white and strong that it blinds one. To be sitting singing on a bench beneath garlands of flowers in an improbably

blue moonlight. To hear shouts of applause. To smell the smell of grease paint and painted scenery. And the familiar, strangely exciting scent of cigarettes, Eau-de-Cologne, and a fresh-smelling English soap . . .

"Make it all come true," said Dima through clenched teeth. "Get it by hook or by crook." And putting every superfluous thought out of her mind, she set to work methodically and calmly on her breathing exercises.

Fräulein Sophie came home early from rehearsal and sat chattering nonsense until Gusti arrived, while Dima pored over a book, studying the history of music. But she listened with half an ear in case *his* name should be mentioned. Yet even so she was startled when this actually occurred, and a slow blush spread over her brown cheeks.

"That Rassiem—he's carrying on with the Herbert girl now!" said Fräulein Sophie. "I can't understand her! A lovely dancer like her. She might have had a prince, but no—they all run after that fellow like mad women. If either of my daughters were to fall in love with him, I'd kill her!"

"With Rassiem?" asked Gusti, who had just come in, her hair in disorder, her cheeks flushed, a suspicious brilliance in her eyes and the faintest of dark lines beneath them. "Fall in love with Rassiem?" she asked, immediately turning her attention to her soup. "Neither of us would be as stupid as that. He's not respectable. A man must be respectable."

Ah ha! Edlinger! thought Dima smiling. But the maid, who was just bringing in the meat, planted herself squarely in the door and said, "Take our new baker for instance—there's a nice-looking fellow!"

Gusti threw down her spoon and burst out laughing. But Fräulein Sophie asked quite seriously, "Is the baker so good-looking? What does he look like?"

When the meal was over Gusti joined Dima in her

room, lay down on the uncompromising old black horsehair sofa, and was silent for a time. Dima was sitting by the window sewing a new green ribbon on her old hat, for Rassiem liked green.

"Edlinger," began Gusti significantly as Dima glanced at her. "Well, Edlinger—" She took a deep breath, and then out it came. "He's going to write to Sophie today."

Since Fräulein Dimatter liked to be taken for the sister of her daughters, she was always referred to as just Sophie.

"He is so respectable," said Gusti happily.

"Yes, he's that right enough. And is that why you want to marry him?"

"Of course."

"Funny—" said Dima. "To marry a man just because he's respectable."

"Oh, you don't know anything about it! Besides, people like us don't get married as easily as all that; and Sophie is quite right: an affair—just for the sake of it—is really rather disgusting."

"Of course. And we're not obliged to. I know. And so now you'll make use of the famous capital and go and buy yourself some dreadful, veneered furniture and set up housekeeping and just be the wife of Herr Edlinger—"

"Herr Edlinger's wife," said Gusti dreamily, closing her eyes.

"Listen, Gusti—" cried Dima, kneeling beside her sister. "Haven't you ever wanted anything more, anything better? Haven't you?"

"Better—in what way? Why? What could be better than getting married? And I'm so fond of him."

Dima lifted her head quickly and looked searchingly into Gusti's eyes. "How funny that sounds," she thought aloud.

"You don't understand it yet."

What is it like: love? To love—? thought Dima, *and does*

it really exist? Surely it only exists in the theater. Or is this business with Rassiem love? Oh, no, that is just child's play, nonsense.

Nonsense, she decided. But nevertheless her heart beat strongly. And suddenly she began to sing.

Chapter Three: TO FORGET IS SUCH LUXURY

AT FOUR O'CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON Elis and Dima met in the arcade of the Opera. A number of people were already gathered before the closed door, for that evening *Die Meistersinger* was to be given. The students of the conductors' classes, clad in heavy coats and boots, had taken up their position at the head of the queue, where they were freezing with cold. The wind was driving hard, dusty crystals of snow before it, which stung the eyes. Elis and Dima fought their way against it with bowed heads, pausing for a moment as usual in front of the music shop where the photographs of the singers were displayed and gazing critically at the striking, theatrical faces, all of them wreathed in complacent smiles.

"He looks just like all the others there," remarked Elis reproachfully, pointing with her chin at one of Rassiem's pictures.

"But he is no different from the others; what do you expect him to look like, your precious Rassiem?"

"Mine—? He's just as much your Rassiem, isn't he?"

"No," said Dima. She would not admit it.

A little creature with wide, hungry eyes joined the waiting crowd and pounced on the name. "Rassiem—" she said. "Hannes Rassiem—" letting the name melt on her tongue like something sweet. "He is supreme, he is in a class by himself—"

Some murmured in agreement, others protested, stamping their cold feet and blowing into their frozen hands.

Kouczowska's name was mentioned. "She was incredibly good! She couldn't stick it with him! He was too much for her! She deceived him! Two such artistes! You'll never find another such Isolde! Nor such a Tristan."

It became warmer. The little group increased visibly. At five o'clock Wilhelm Gelfius, the chorus master, stalked up with a large score under his arm, and the pockets of his thin overcoat obviously bulging with books of all sorts. Immediately afterward there was a rattling of keys, and an old porter opened the doors. The crowd flung themselves into the passage, eagerly rounded a corner, and wedged themselves in the maze of the barriers. Ah! Here it was nice and warm. The gaslight sang, damp clothes began to steam gently, and tired knees, arms, and shoulders leaned and pressed against each other companionably. Everybody knew everybody else—they were bound together by something indefinable and they preserved a perfect understanding of one another even in the most heated of discussions and hair-raising arguments. They gestured extravagantly in their fervent hunger for art, music, experience; their ages ranged perhaps from seventeen to twenty—and in their sparkling, effervescent youth they were completely happy. For that evening they were to hear *Die Meistersinger.*

At half-past six the box-office opened. There was shouting in front, which increased with the press of people. Some were allowed through the barrier. They plunged at the box-office with anxious faces, threw down the exact price of their seat, which they held in readiness; and then they could be heard scurrying upstairs, invariably taking three of the lower steps at a bound.

Dima, who had performed at the theater as a child, was privileged to balance herself on a brass bar which cut off a stairway; Gelfius settled himself comfortably on a step, above which an emergency light lent its dull red glow to

the reading of his score; and Elis, who sat behind him on a proper seat, had no wish to see anything, only to listen.

The lights were lit in the theater and it began to fill. The instruments down below raised their voices in tuning up. The shrill A of the oboe rose above the confused arabesques of sound and from somewhere came, brief and staccato, the motif of the Apprentices' dance. Elis was forced to smile, because her hands were growing cold. "The moment I hear that tuning up and see the curtain, it's like a fever, Gelfius," she murmured. He growled something inaudible over his score, which he was studying lovingly. Dima, on the other hand, was sitting bolt upright on her bar gazing with excited eyes at the noisy, restless house. Suddenly she started and at the same moment it seemed as though the whole audience took a deep breath. There was a brief whispering, a rustling, then silence. Down below, the small spare figure of the adored Director, head thrust forward, darted through the orchestra. With a quick glance at the stalls, he swung himself to his seat. His spectacles glittered in the sudden darkness.

And then he launched the sparkling C sharp of the first bar into the breathless darkness.

Elis rested her head in her hands and abandoned herself to the music. Her listening was boundless: it was an ecstasy to which she surrendered herself completely, to which she succumbed, giddy, with trembling knees and a strange, bitter-sweet burning in her throat. Gelfius, who followed the conducting with surreptitious little movements of his own, through every modulation of tone and phrasing, now violent, now calm, heard her sigh once, deeply and shudderingly; it was just before Stolzing's *"Commence!"* The suspense in which she awaited the heroic tones of Rassiem's voice was almost unbearable. Gelfius took his eyes from his score and looked at her. He was touched by the sight of her small white hands, and

her head clasped so abandonedly between them, with the light of the emergency lamp playing softly on her hair. While Dima, on the other hand, balancing on her bar, sat erect, with wide open, calm eyes, and tightly closed lips that were just a straight line in the dark boyish face.

The interval came with its noise and wild applause. Elis awoke at the light as though from a blow. Silent and alone, she discovered Dima in the corridor in the midst of the noisy, chattering, munching crowd. Dima had had an idea, a tremendous idea for Isolde. Something at which Rassiem would marvel, and Elis and Gelfius and the Lukas. But she could not describe it, only act it. And she stretched out her arms and promised herself "When I sing Isolde—"

The name Rassiem was not mentioned, for lately Dima had been strange and stubborn, and would not admit, simply refused to admit, that she had ever worshiped him as a hero. Whereas Elis was ashamed to be alone with her feelings, which were growing worse and worse—worse and worse. So they were silent for a time, both thinking of him: that he was beautiful today, and young and wonderful—

"Fräulein Kerckhoff," asked Wilhelm Gelfius suddenly in the next interval. "Fräulein Kerckhoff, have you any idea what a *Quartsextakkord* is?"

"Not the remotest."

"There you are. I thought as much. You are neglecting your theory lessons. You don't seem to want to learn any theory. One can see that by the way you listen. Do you know how you listen? Like a dilettante!"

"Oh! Gelfius, then dilettantes must be very happy—"

"Happy—yes, I dare say they are. But do you believe, do you really believe," he asked, whispering in his earnestness, "that this music here, this music"—and he grasped his score—"exists simply to make you and other thoughtless people happy in that way?"

"I'm not as thoughtless as all that, Gelfius. No—on the contrary, I think too much. But through music I am able to forget so many things. I don't have a very good time—not very," Elis reflected, thinking of her home, of her father and mother. "To forget is such a luxury," she said softly, and realized at once how exaggerated and false this sounded.

"Ah! now we've got the truth!" cried Gelfius, quite genuinely angry. "Do you know what it is, to enjoy music in that way? It's disgusting! Luxury! Huh!"

Elis raised her eyes and looked vaguely before her. She was suddenly very tired and exhausted.

"Elis," said Gelfius, suddenly changed and urgent. "I implore you to learn your theory, to work; learn harmony, learn accidence. You must get a clearer idea of things. You are letting yourself go; you mustn't abandon yourself so. I have been watching you for a long time, for a long time, Elis. The way you sing, the way you listen, the way you study music, is just suicide—"

"Suicide?" said Elis, smiling. "Do you know, Gelfius, that isn't a bad idea: suicide through music. I believe it would be possible, to listen to Tristan until one died—"

Then the lights darkened. *And now for yet more,* thought Elis, bowing her head in her hands. Only once during the act did she look up: when the Tristan motive sounded in the midst of the sunny cheerfulness of the cobbler's room, a trembling reminder, a longing, for something . . .

Then Elis looked up and a strangely fleeting and disturbing smile played in her eyes.

Chapter Four: TORMENT AND ECSTASY

HANNES RASSIEM LEFT THE LITTLE RED-HAIRED DANCER at three o'clock in the morning, and went home whistling.

The air was cold and dry. A very dark sky full of bright sparkling stars was spread over the town. Rassiem carried his hat in his hand and let the light, sharp wind blow his hair off his brow. It was refreshing after so much wine and so many wild embraces. And it blew away the scent of the little creature.

She should be taught to use some other perfume, he reflected, something not so sweet, something that would match her red hair and empty eyes; it should have a slightly bitter flavor—

His nostrils curled. However, he decided it was not worth worrying about, and yawned. Well, he had tired himself out and would perhaps be able to sleep. That was something.

He walked along beside the wall of the Schwarzenburger Gardens, watching his tall, long shadow, running elastically beside him with the same broad, sloping shoulders and massive chest and the same sweeping stage stride. He was moderately pleased with himself and lifted his arm with an extravagant gesture and pressed his hand to his brow. His shadow did likewise. Rassiem whistled contentedly and turned into the quiet diplomatic quarter in which he lived.

His valet was asleep in the hall. Lights in their silken shades were burning all over the flat, waiting for him. He had a secret fear of coming home in the morning twilight, and feeling his way through the rooms with a candle in his hand. A face was liable to spring frighteningly out of a mirror—a pale face, with dark-ringed eyes, a slack, half-tipsy face with many wrinkles at the chin and temples.

For Hannes Rassiem was forty years old.

On his bedside table lay a letter from London. Rassiem's hands, his eyes, became excited; his whole being became alert and intent. For the letter was from his divorced wife.

Dear Friend, wrote the Kouczowska, *I am sitting here*

with packed trunks in a hotel room, whose hideous wallpaper would soon drive me crazy. My train does not go for a couple of hours. It is deadly dull, as dull as it can only be in London on a real English Sunday. I could not get anything hot to eat for lunch. I dare not go into the reading-room because a poor youth who loves me with a devotion worthy of better things is sitting there. In a weak moment I told him to be there, and now, unfortunately, there he is. But with the best will in the world I could not see him today—his expression is so intense that it exasperates me.

I have had some successes here, but that is not particularly interesting, is it? I go to America again shortly. But before that I shall be singing in Brussels, on Thursday. Would you perhaps care to come there and talk to me for a little while? It would be nice of you—

There the letter ended, with a funny little squiggle that was supposed to represent Maria. And then there was one more sentence written along the margin in squeezed, crooked characters:

Dearest—sometimes I am so afraid for you—

Hannes Rassiem clenched his teeth, so that a blue vein stood out like a weal on his forehead. He turned out the light and lay quiet for a time in the dark, the crackling letter in his hands, his mind a blank. The blood pulsed in his temples, making red rings dance in the blackness before his eyes, red and pale-green and vivid orange-colored rings, stars, and circles, which revolved and merged into one another. And then he remembered a voice, small sallow hands, a face with heavy-lidded dark eyes and a mouth full of suffering, which laughed—and bowed down. . . . Hannes Rassiem sobbed.

The next day Hannes Rassiem went to Brussels.

He left at midday, tired and exhausted by the trouble-

some business of obtaining leave of absence; his head ached and he could not keep track of his thoughts. He sat in the dining-car for a while, in front of him a cup of bad coffee and a liqueur that tasted of soap. The landscape slipping past outside was drowned in a thick, sleety rain. Slowly it rose in hills and mountains, slowly it fell away to flat plains. The day dragged on endlessly to the rhythmic murmur of the train. Evening came and spread like a cloak over everything. Rassiem went to his compartment and slept a deep, dreamless sleep, disturbed only occasionally by a jolt, the cries of a guard, or the light cast into the compartment by a station lamp.

The performance had already commenced when Hannes Rassiem arrived in Brussels. He left his luggage at his usual hotel. "The room next to Madame Kouczowska!" ordered the immaculate reception clerk.

"Did—Madame wish it?" asked Rassiem, filled with sudden pleasure.

No, Madame had made no mention of Monsieur's arrival. Rassiem stared in mute rage at the suave, business-like face. A blind fury assailed him and for a moment he was sorry that he had come. Turn back, go home, get drunk, anything rather than allow oneself to be tormented like this, to suffer like a hopelessly lovesick boy.

He turned away abruptly and ordered some roses to be sent to the Kouczowska's dressing-room, with a card giving only his Christian name. Then he changed quickly and drove to the theater.

They were playing the second act of *Tosca* as he entered his box. The Kouczowska was on her knees before a dull, stiff Scarpia. Her small clenched hands were raised. Her silver dress, molded to her figure, caught the light of the footlights and the yellow candles and shattered it into fluid opal colors. She was suffering. This Tosca was visibly suffering. Her every feature expressed it: her eyes, her eye-

brows, devoid of make-up, her wide, curving mouth, each of her small-boned limbs, which writhed and quivered as though under a whip. Offstage Mario was groaning and in the orchestra, with increasing gruesomeness, the torment was being screwed tighter and tighter round his head. Suddenly Rassiem noticed his own hands; they were clenched on the edge of the box, with the nails plunged deep into the pale red plush. He was forced to smile, because he had forgotten that this was only the theater, because there was a woman who could make him forget it, and because he loved this woman. But of this he was not fully aware; it was something only half realized. Then he abandoned himself, completely and absolutely, breathless with excitement and shaken to the core.

He was roused at the end of the act by the lights and applause. He set his dress-shirt to rights before the mirror in the box, smoothed his hand over his hair, assumed an impassive man-of-the-world expression, and then passed through the iron doors leading to the stage, and made his way along winding passages, in which lurked players in their make-up, to his wife's dressing-room.

Within its white walls the Kouczowska was standing before a tall mirror, immediately beneath glaring lights, and her mask-like face smiled at him over her shoulder. His roses were lying on top of a mountain of flowers.

"What a delightful surprise!" said the Kouczowska. "What are you doing in Brussels, Hannes?" She held out her hand to him, while a pale, large-eyed girl smeared her arm with *eau-de-lys*. "How funny that we should meet here!"

"But, Maria, you wrote telling me that you would be here today, and that you would like to see me; so naturally I came."

"Oh! Did I write that? I had forgotten!" she said abstractedly, for she was very carefully painting lines of

shadow along her nostrils; and then, more softly: "I thought I had only wished it—" She paused and smiled into his eyes. His eyes wavered; they returned to the mirror.

"Sit down, if you can find an empty chair. I have plenty of time. Tell me: How are you living? What are you singing? And—my dear—were you pleased with me?"

"You are marvelous," said Rassiem. Keeping himself carefully under control, he sat in his basket chair, breathing the intimate, exciting perfume of his wife, watching the passionately loved body leaning toward the mirror, the body that was so familiar, so full of memories in every movement. Her voice was in his ears—the voice that in itself was such an exquisite pleasure—and his heart contracted in torment.

He sat twisting in his fingers the cigarette which he must not smoke, making polite conversation, saying the right thing and smiling with an expressionless face and a mouth which was filled with a bitter taste.

"What a pity that I am engaged for this evening," said the Kouczowska. "I have to go to supper with some very dull people. It would have been so nice to have been alone with you—but I could hardly invite you to come along too; it would make things rather awkward, wouldn't it? We must meet at breakfast tomorrow in the hotel!"

By a superhuman effort Rassiem controlled himself, and catching sight of his expressionless face in the glass, he congratulated himself. "It is a pity," he said. "I shan't be here tomorrow. My train leaves at five in the morning. My leave of absence will be up. But if you are already engaged—"

A bell pealed. "I'll see you here at the end of the performance—for certain, my dear, for certain!" the Kouczowska begged. Her hands and eyes became nervous. "Now you must go; I have to take my cue. *Auf Wiedersehen—*"

He clasped her hands for a second in his own, in the way that had always calmed her before she sang: Even now those delicate, trembling hands lay soothed in his. "That's lovely, Hannes—but now go—"

The door slammed behind him; he stood outside for a moment with clenched hands, breathing savagely through his teeth. A dangerous turmoil was mounting within him, a longing to scream, to beat the walls with his fists, to drag the woman to the ground by her hair—and kick—kick—

He rushed out into the open and lit his cigarette. Rain ran down his face, and the drops splashed on his starched shirt, bringing him to his senses. He returned to his box and sat there mutely and vacantly until the end of the opera, from time to time grinding his teeth and fully resolved not to see his wife again.

Later he stood in the shadow of a wall by the stage door, with his collar turned up and his silk hat jammed low over his forehead. Young people crowded round him, but their eagerness was not for him, which added to his bitterness. A car was waiting, purring impatiently, for the Kouczowska. In its brightly lit interior were vases of heavy nodding heads of lilac. Suddenly the young people became louder. Their broad, unpleasantly accented French became noisier. There she was, buried in furs. A short elderly man helped her into the car, turned out the electric light, and the little scene ended in a cloud of petrol vapor and the cheers of the crowd.

Rassiem went back to his hotel, put his watch on the table, and turned out all the lights, except the blue-shaded lamp on the writing-desk. He sat thus for a long time, his head in his hands, filled with ever-recurring, turbulent thoughts that were unreasoning and hopeless, like those of a child.

For Hannes Rassiem was not clever. He knew nothing about himself except that he was handsome and famous,

that he possessed a beautiful voice and that he could sing, that he could, indeed, sing like the great Italian singers of long ago, although he was a Wagnerian singer, which made things easier for him. To be able to sing, that was the only thing that seemed important to him. Everything else he accepted without further thought, living his life as it came to him, with its trifling, frivolous pleasures, not very happily but nevertheless almost without pain or perception. Only one thing touched him: his love for his wife. She could make him happy, torment him, pain him, shatter him. And because of these torments, which alone vitalized him, he was bound to this woman with indestructible bonds.

But of this Hannes Rassiem himself was ignorant.

And now he sat there, hunched up, his head buried in his hands, waiting for morning to come so that he might go. The clock on the table ticked nervously, cutting up time into hasty little seconds, that seemed to be in a hurry and yet did not progress. He thought of how he had journeyed for two days to speak to his wife for five minutes, and how in those five minutes she had hurt him bitterly. He imagined her as she might be now—even now while he was suffering—laughing and moving about in a gay, brilliant room, bending her head back over her naked shoulders—her eyelids closed—she was kissing someone—

He thrust the picture far away from him and jumped up. It suddenly occurred to him that the tenor that evening had been rotten—a thought that comforted him a little. He lay down on the sofa and closed his eyes. The big duet from the last act passed through his mind. He ran through it, improvised on it, and then the notes got jumbled together. Hannes Rassiem was asleep.

Much later the door opened softly, and the Kouczowska stole in on tiptoe. Her heavy, copper hair was loose, and a wide, deep blue kimono fell softly from her shoulders.

She bent over the sleeper and smiled. He was so handsome, and now, as he slept, he looked like a great big boy. There was something about the shadow cast by his long lashes on his cheeks that was so touching and endearing.

"You dear, handsome animal," softly whispered the Kouczowska, bending low over him. He opened his eyes and raised his hands, confused by dreams. She was seized with a trembling; she held back yet a moment, and then she flung herself impetuously upon him. He cried aloud through clenched teeth, a cry that was half of joy and half a sob, and so uncontrolled that it made her tremble, in an ecstasy that she knew and loved. "You belong to me —darling—" she murmured as he carried her unprotesting to his bed.

Chapter Five: THE FABRIC OF DREAMS

THIN, UGLY WILHELM GELFIUS sat at the piano extemporizing in anxious, impatient chords. From time to time he glanced stealthily at Elisabeth Kerckhoff, who was standing at the window with her forehead pressed against the pane, staring out with wide-open eyes. They had been waiting for an hour for Rassiem, who did not come, and still did not come. A broad, bright shaft of morning sun flooded the room, and dust particles danced glittering in the beam. Fräulein Lukas leaned against the stove, talking softly and earnestly to the baritone Lorm, who was frowning and silent. Lately she had grown paler and had acquired a weary, listless habit of pushing her hair forward and entwining her arms behind her blond head; sometimes she looked as though she had been crying.

Wilhelm Gelfius, who had formed his own conclusions, looked displeased. He glanced about the room. Other girls were sitting there, all with the same restless expression, and all with their hair done in the way Rassiem liked—

neatly coiled round the head. Elis alone wore plaits. She had such heavy hair and suffered from such headaches. But Dima's dark curls tumbled short and unruly at the nape of her neck, quite beyond control. She sat squeezed into a corner, her fingers in her ears, reading with hungry eyes a book that Elis had lent her.

"Still not here? Isn't he coming?" asked Gelfius over his shoulder of Elis.

She started, and forced a strained smile. "No."

The clock in the passage struck twelve softly. "It's time for my piano lesson!" cried the untalented little Bach. "The Herr Kammersänger will have to do without me," the tenor Breitenstein decided; while Lorm, the dark baritone, announced with relief, "I shouldn't have been able to do anything, anyway!" There was noise and laughter, and the little group of students dispersed.

"Shall we go too?" asked Elis. "He won't come now, Dima!" Dima shook her head, without looking up from her book. "He'll come, all right," she said.

Gelfius laughed angrily and thumped the piano. "You know by instinct, I suppose, Dimatter? The clairvoyance of love, what? If only you knew how stupid you all are with your hero-worship!" he cried with unnecessary emphasis, jumping up and standing in front of Elis. "Child!" he said, softly and urgently. "Child—you're looking quite pale, take care of yourself—"

Dima shut her book with a bang and announced, "There you are! There's the object of our longing."

And Rassiem entered, with hollow eyes, in which the dark pupils shone feverishly; dusty, tired and still in his traveling-clothes.

"Excuse me, ladies," he said. "I've come straight from the station. I had to go to Brussels unexpectedly. Who's going to sing first? Fräulein Lukas? Good—the aria from the *Creation.*"

Fräulein Lukas slowly disengaged herself from the stove.

"I can't—I can't sing today. I'm not in voice. Please excuse me—"

"All right, all right. Who's next? Fräulein Dimatter, please!"

Dima's cheeks were flushed and excited as she began to sing, and her clenched hands trembled a little. It was the big aria from *Fidelio,* and she plunged like a mad thing into the grandiose hatred of the opening. As she sang, Rassiem sat with gleaming, vacant eyes, indifferent, exhausted, not listening, drumming impatiently with his fingers on his knees. Suddenly he stood up. "Forgive me—I can't take the class today. I'm tired—overstrained—I cannot listen—"

Dima broke off and stood for a second without moving. Her lips felt dry and her scalp turned cold. "As you wish, Herr Kammersänger," she said in a broken, suppressed voice. Suddenly she snatched her music, tore it in half, flung it from her so that it fluttered down in fragments. With head thrown back, she dashed through the door, which slammed violently behind her.

Elis looked aghast at Rassiem. But he did not seem to be angry. He stooped down slowly to pick up the music and to hide an unexpected smile. "Well—?" he said slowly to Gelfius. "There's temperament—what? A very grown-up young woman! Oughtn't you to go and calm your friend, Fräulein Kerckhoff?"

Elis slipped out reluctantly.

"The idiots—the silly fools," said Gelfius to the door, as it shut behind her. Rassiem laughed.

"These ridiculous little girls! And as jealous as the devil! They can positively smell it when one comes from another woman. But that child—by Jove—she'll get somewhere. She's got breeding."

Elis found Dima sitting by the window in the passage angrily scratching off the wall a heart that she had once carved there. It looked rather pathetic with a great burst of flames shooting from the top of it and its center filled with a large *H.R.* Dima's nails scratched the wall like furious little animals. Her eyes were wet and shining.

"Are you crying?" asked Elis.

"You know I can't cry. I wish I could. But— Oh, dear!"

"Whatever was the matter with you?"

"Oh, just nonsense. That wretch! Do you know what he was up to in Brussels? He was with the Kouczowska. Now he's divorced from her, he starts running after her again."

"He ought to be forbidden to do it," said Elis with contempt, though her heart contracted painfully. "Besides: he knows now—"

"Knows? What does he know?"

"Well—that—that you are in love with him."

"In love? Rubbish, Elis!" Suddenly she laughed and dropped her hands. "That stupid heart is so obstinate, it won't be scratched out." She pulled out a pencil and started to touch up the damaged heart.

"Don't scribble on the walls!" called Frau Gibich, the supervisor, scratching her forehead anxiously with her knitting-needle.

For scratched into the dingy windowpanes, the brown window frames, the yellow walls, everywhere, there were innumerable hearts in every shape and form: some sleek, some flaming, and others pierced with arrows. There were prodigal hearts divided into compartments, which contained different initials, while others burned blazing over one single name, and *H.R.* appeared frequently. They bore eloquent witness to the generations of students that had proclaimed their love there. And now Elis and Dima sat before them, speaking in their turn of love.

"It's bad form to be in love with a Kammersänger," said Elis precociously. "And a tenor into the bargain! And besides: love. We've no idea what it means: to love. We just sit here in front of this closed, grimy window, wondering what it can be: love—"

"I don't believe there is such a thing as love. It only exists in books—or in the theater; it is only make-believe." And after a pause: "All the same—aren't we in love ourselves?"

"I wonder," said Elis, and then, shyly: "But do you believe that this can be the real thing, the grand passion?"

"Good heavens, Elis. Love." Dima seemed to hold the word up between finger and thumb. "We two and our blessed Hannes Rassiem! He's gradually getting fat and he's a bounder, that is all we know about him; we don't really know him at all!"

Elis bowed her head thoughtfully, and then she began to speak, eagerly and quickly at first and then gradually more slowly, while a slow blush spread over her cheeks. "Yes, that's true! He is getting fat and he probably is a bounder and even stupid. But how beautifully he sings! In the evenings I sit at the Opera and listen to him. He is everything I want: handsome and noble and knightly and everything else. All day long I wait for the evening—" She opened her eyes wide in wonder. "What else is there for me to do, Dima! what else?" she asked softly. "And then I hear him sing and I am so happy—oh, I can't explain it. I can think of nothing but him day and night. Isn't that love?"

Dima felt ashamed and could not look at her friend. "It's nonsense," she decided. "You've got a crush on him. But love?"

"I know it's a crush. But don't laugh at it. I don't know anything about him, I don't want to know him properly. If I were to know him, Dima, if I were to know him," said

Elis urgently, "I wouldn't be able to love him. He would be just ordinary and stupid and ugly like everything else. But he is far away and I can hang all my dreams on him. Isn't that love?"

They were silent for a long time. Then Dima, because she was very ashamed of herself, covered her face with her hands and said softly, "I love him—in a different way. You wouldn't understand it. I want to have him very close to me. I'm crazy about him. It is all so thrilling. It's so thrilling when the classroom smells of his cigarettes, or when he shakes hands with me, or when I think at home he has touched my music. He, the man I love. Then everything is just wonderful."

Fräulein Lukas walked up the passage and leaned against the wall beside Elis. But Dima did not see her; she said softly, "He has such beautiful hands—hasn't he?" And after a pause: "I believe I could die if he wished it."

"Is that love?" asked Elis gazing through the window.

Suddenly Fräulein Lukas leaned forward and said, "You're talking like silly little fools. You're just babies. Love is something very different. Love is to hunger and yearn and to want to kiss and kiss and kiss—do you know anything about that? And you talk of love."

Elis jumped, her eyes wide and large. "Have—you—ever kissed—anyone?"

"Perhaps I have," said Fräulein Lukas, strangely tired and dreamy; then she turned and went listlessly down the passage.

Dima looked after her with interest. "Do you think—he—?" she asked of the air.

They were silent. Elis said frigidly, "I'm cold; come away from the window."

Hannes Rassiem came out of the classroom with Gelfius, and stopped beside the two girls. "You must forgive me for the lesson you missed, Fräulein Dimatter," he said

with a little friendly smile. "If you like, we could make it up tomorrow. Come at five o'clock to my flat."

Chapter Six: "GIRLS ARE LIKE TORCHES."

IN FEBRUARY THE KOUCZOWSKA sent an ugly, colored post card from New York, with nothing on it but: *Best wishes! Maria Kouczowska;* and it seemed as though it meant no more than that. That was the worst of it. *It's as though I had asked her for an autograph,* thought Rassiem bitterly, and threw the card into the fire. It bent, cockled, and turned brown. One towering building remained untouched for some time, but then tiny flames burst through the windows, and it collapsed in a final blaze.

And without his knowing exactly how it happened, Hannes Rassiem's troubles then began.

In the first place he was not pleased, very far from pleased, with his voice. After the second act of *Tannhäuser* he sat in his dressing-room crying hopelessly, like a child, because he thought he was finished, utterly and completely finished. Professor Bayer, the doctor attached to the theater, arrived, smiling away over the tops of his glasses, and exercised all the powers of persuasion which he had acquired from long experience of many stars. He quietly shook up a bromide solution in a glass and dosed Rassiem with champagne. After five minutes' delay the third act was able to proceed. Hannes Rassiem sang his part with exceptional beauty.

During the night he threw the little dancer's shoes at her head, and the dancer herself out of her bedroom, because the scent of her got on his nerves. Then he went for a few days to his villa in Rodaun, and shut himself up away there to think. He had come to the painful conclusion that his musical attack was very bad, that he was not a tenor but a baritone, that he would have to re-learn

everything, everything. Whereupon he returned to Vienna and began to study the *Wahn* monologue from *Die Meistersinger,* which goes so low in the register that after three days he really did become quite hoarse. Professor Bayer appeared, inspected the reddened and inflamed vocal cords in his sympathetic way, and insisted on complete rest. Rassiem tied an enormous white silk scarf round his throat and excused himself from *Lohengrin.* The house was sold out, and a well-known guest singer had to be summoned from Munich, and many people declared he was better than Rassiem.

The audience applauded, the circles were wildly enthusiastic, in the gallery there was strife and uproar; someone received a box on the ears. Rassiem's class stood in a solid wall and hissed. As for him, he found himself, against all the rules of the house, in the background of a box butting his sick head in his hands like a madman.

After the performance he went to the Tabarin and amused himself there desperately and bitterly.

When he reached home early in the morning, it occurred to him that for the past ten days he had forgotten to give his lessons at the Conservatoire. He announced that he was ill, then pulling himself together, he became a little more sensible and with a heavy sigh, summoned Dima, Elis, and Fräulein Lukas to his flat on three different afternoons. But he tore up the card to Fräulein Lukas.

The two girls came, as they had come in the past. Elis, shy, gentle, and just a little sympathetic because he was ill; Dima, with hungry eyes, and tight-shut mouth and fists, in constant defense against all the luxury around her, and against his eyes and hands, which were infected with a vague disquiet by her presence. Every day one of them came at twilight to sing a little and to overcome, without knowing it, the worst hour of the day and the fear of darkness and of being alone with his thoughts.

During this period Dima and Elis avoided one another and were silent when they were together, for neither of them wished to talk of her secret, and each imagined herself the most favored. But at night Rassiem went from one restaurant to another, drinking. Well, he was going through a bad period anyway, so what of it.

He drank beer to make himself sleepy, Moselle to wake himself up again, champagne to make him—despite himself—a little more lively; Burgundy to calm him; Cointreau toward morning when he began to have a headache; and finally Mocha. Ten, twelve cups of strong black coffee, which resulted in a pleasant tingling in his hands, shivers down his back, palpitations and gleaming, flickering pupils . . .

Then he would sink heavily into bed and sleep until the afternoon. An hour with Elis or Dima, an hour that merged softly into the twilight, with a little music, half-whispered words, and brief, casual touches—a sweet and gentle hour, an hour of fragrance and shy affection that was just pleasantly disturbing.

Then it would be evening again, always evening again, which meant lights and noise in an endless succession of big rooms. One plunged into these rooms and sloughed off one's feverish discontent in the general excitement, where it disappeared as in a stream. One intoxicated oneself with perfume, wine, laughter, and women. One ranted and raved, thumping tables, and clasping bare shoulders until at last one buried one's teeth in someone's neck, venting one's madness on no matter what woman, in no matter what room; and, in the end, always the same depression and contempt. Everything was veiled in a mist of wine and jangling words that were meaningless and yet exciting. Was it not always the same room—blurred as in a dream—the same mirror, the same stained plush sofa, always the same red-shaded lamp? Always the same woman?

Toward morning one would stand up in some overcrowded, overheated place, leaning unsteadily against the table and sing the "Song of the Grail," while near by a starving violin wailed a modern dance tune. There would be a crowd applauding and it would seem as though they all wore masks. Roses would rain down, falling cool and damp upon one's temples. One would find oneself in the open air and then squeezed into a car with a crowd of strangers who called one by one's Christian name. The sharp fumes of petrol stung one's eyes and reminded one refreshingly of drives in summer time. Then back to yet another room. More glasses, more music, more laughter. A woman bending over a glass in which violet petals were floating. . . .

Morning would come, slow and gray and unpleasant, rolling its heavy mists against the windows of a café, reluctant to bring the daylight. But the little lights on the marble tables and the big, green shaded lights over the billiard tables would grow tired of shining and turn dim and flickering. Yellow-faced waiters unwillingly brought coffee and liqueurs; the highly colored lady at the buffet was already asleep with her head drooping against the stand full of sweetmeats; a girl in pale green stood out startlingly from a champagne advertisement, reminding one of somebody. And next door, in the gambling-room, an old woman raised clouds of dust, putting the chairs on the tables where they lifted their upturned legs mournfully to the ceiling. Counters clicked harshly in their nickel containers. All the people had gone and they had left Hannes Rassiem alone. . . .

He looked in a mirror and saw his collar—slightly gray, rather crumpled—and he was ashamed.

At the beginning of March he began singing again for the first time. There was the most tremendous excitement in the house. The gallery clubbed together and sent an

enormous laurel wreath with a fluttering ribbon proclaiming praise and thanksgiving in letters of gold, which Rassiem dragged with him to the footlights ten times. The next morning Gelfius appeared, for now Rassiem was to begin studying Parsifal for Bayreuth.

Wilhelm Gelfius relieved himself of his enormous umbrella in the hall. Berger, the servant, opened the door and winked significantly.

"Well, Berger?"

"The Herr Kammersänger is still asleep; but if I may venture to say so, the Herr Kammersänger seems to have got over the worst. We were home by one o'clock; we have only consumed one bottle of wine; and yesterday we managed without a lady's company."

"All right! All right!" replied Gelfius, and entered the room still wearing his hat and coat, at which Berger looked most shocked. He found Rassiem asleep, his pajama jacket open over his broad, massive chest. His bare throat in which a pulse was beating, his long lashes, with their childish droop, his wild curly hair over his forehead, all looked so young and attractive that Gelfius was obliged to smile, and he looked down thoughtfully at his own long, crooked legs. *A beautiful creature, and so gifted—one must make allowances,* he thought, in a sudden access of soft-heartedness, which infuriated him.

Rassiem woke up and immediately asked, "How did I sing yesterday?"

"You sang," said Gelfius, wagging an admonitory forefinger, "you sang like a thoroughly indisposed screech owl!"

Rassiem sighed deeply. Berger brought in breakfast and the newspapers. Rassiem started to read and cheered up visibly. "What fools!" he said. "They never notice anything; they were very pleased. I may have sung rottenly, but it was still far too good for them."

"All the same, Rassiem, take a little more care of your voice. Sometimes I am a little anxious and afraid for you."

"So am I. Anxious and afraid," said Rassiem, so suddenly and obviously sincere that Gelfius was silent. In the bathroom Berger was indulging in little bursts of noisy activity, and Rassiem, disappearing in his dressing-gown behind a portiere, started a mild argument over his conception of Parsifal—for he had his own ideas on the subject. They reached an agreement, and Gelfius, ordered to talk of something else, started playing with scissors and files, looking uncomfortable and not altogether pleased.

"What's the matter with the Lukas these days?" he asked suddenly. "What have you been doing to her, Rassiem?"

"Oh, Lord! The Lukas again! She bores me, that's all. Did she come along and weep over you?"

"No, but she has changed. What's the matter?"

"Why not ask Lorm? It's his turn now! He should know more than I do."

"Lorm? I see. But I can't quite make it out all the same. The girl was fond of you. And now she suddenly throws herself at this Lorm fellow from Tarnopol, and always looks as if she's been crying. Her shoes are down at heel, her clothes shabby, her hair untidy. Something's wrong, Rassiem."

"Well?" he replied from beneath the shower, shouting above the noise of the water. "All right; she was in love with me, and I was nice to her"—at this Berger smiled knowingly, and Gelfius drummed angry fingers on the dressing-table—"but then she became too persistent, started running after me and being jealous. If one kisses a girl like that once, she immediately imagines one belongs to her body and soul. That was too much of a good thing for me, and I told her so quite distinctly. Now she leaves me in peace. Besides, she's a little too fat," he added

as an afterthought, "and then those appalling high notes of hers."

Gelfius suppressed a smile. "And what does this business with Lorm mean?"

"Oh, Lord!" said Rassiem, watching carefully while Berger rubbed his thighs. "These girls are like torches; someone sets them alight, and then they burn, burn for anybody."

"When it comes to women or singing, Rassiem, you are almost intelligent! By the way, is the red-haired dancer finished with too?"

"Oh, her?" said Rassiem softly and reminiscently. "She wasn't my sort; she drank—just think of that!" And then Gelfius really had to laugh.

"And now, if my knowledge of human nature doesn't deceive me, it's the Dimatter's turn?" he asked, looking Rassiem straight in the eyes.

"Ah! there's a lovely girl! With breeding and talent too. She interests me. She has a peculiar attraction of her own, something untamed—"

"And have you no pity for her?" asked Gelfius, "Aren't you in the least sorry for her?"

"Sorry? Whatever for? The girl is head over heels in love! She ought to be happy! When once she's lived with a man she'll become beautiful and mature. I know the type. It has got to be. I can't study the Walkyrie and Isolde with her while she's still a thin, stupid girl. You must let her have her experience—and then she'll be worth something."

"You think so?" said Gelfius, and after a pause, nervously and with an effort: "What do you think of the other one, Fräulein Kerckhoff?"

"She's sweet," said Rassiem simply. "I'm as fond of her as I would be of a child. She is so dainty and out-of-the-ordinary—she has been here several times. One can talk to her, she is so marvelously soothing. I let her sing quiet lit-

tle songs—Schubert, Wolf, Cornelius—she does it in her own peculiar way. You know—it's strange—I wouldn't dare to touch that girl, I positively wouldn't dare to. It's funny, isn't it? She has such great childlike eyes and is so easily frightened."

"Really?" said Gelfius, much relieved and full of suppressed laughter. Then going to the window, he started to whistle and beat time to one of Schubert's marches, the lovely cheerful one in G, the one that changes so beautifully from the minor to the major key, like the shadows of clouds playing over sunny meadows.

Chapter Seven: THE AWAKENING HEART

IT HAPPENED LATE ONE AFTERNOON IN APRIL, a day of fat-bellied, slaty clouds slowly propelling themselves across the sky, creeping along like slow animals, casting a strange yellowish light. The air was hot and motionless as Dima made her way to Rassiem. The treetops hung drooping and silent over the walls of the Schwarzenberg Gardens. A blossom fluttered sleepily down onto the white silk blouse which Dima had borrowed from Gusti, a blossom from a flowering crab apple tree, which stood out fawn-colored against the yellow sky. She turned into the street; everything seemed to be holding its breath. Then a sudden darkness spread over the roofs.

Rassiem was going through another bad period. His voice did not please him. He was drinking, smoking too much, and gambling. Now he lay on the sofa, afraid of himself, disturbed by the weather. As Dima entered, he held out his hands, with their blue swollen veins, and incessantly trembling fingers. "Look at that, Dima! Nerves! Smoking too much, and this weather!"

"There will be a thunderstorm, the first this spring, Herr Kammersänger."

"Do you think so?" he said, relieved. "Oh—a storm! You will have to stay here with me until it's over. Will you, Dima?" And then like a child: "I am so alone and so frightened of thunder."

"Frightened? You?"

"Yes, frightened." He stated it so simply that Dima was suddenly convinced. She went to the piano and idly turned over the leaves of the music that was laid there in readiness for her, *Tristan and Isolde.*

He watched her, watched her with a smile that infuriated her; she felt her scalp turn cold and her lips dry up. He continued to smile into her eyes, watching them grow darker and darker.

"Well!" he said suddenly, and came to the piano. "Let's make a start. Now we are going to begin with Isolde."

Dima began to sing.

Rassiem listened attentively as he accompanied her, and thought how rich and beautiful a voice it was and how talented was this great, big innocent of a girl. *She'll do it!* he thought; *she'll be a star.* Suddenly he remembered the Kouczowska, whose voice was failing her, who had never possessed such resonance as this immature, strangely passionate Dima. *Soon she will be finished,* he thought; and his most secret thought was: *Then she will come back to me, my Maria—*

Dima was silent. Rassiem was buried in his own thoughts and said after a pause, "Do you know what that was like? So beautiful that it reminded me of the Kouczowska."

Dima breathed deeply and looked at the ground; there was a strange tightness in her throat. Suddenly she bent low over his hand and kissed it.

They were such hot lips—and he had felt the light pressure of her teeth too. "Dima—my dear—?" he said uncertainly.

She started back. He gazed at her with an expression suddenly changed. "How you have grown!" he said and his glance embraced the whole of her: her brown, curved neck, her shoulders over which the white silk stretched gleaming, the delicately indicated young breasts, and the arms strong and slender, pressed close to her body as though in defense.

"Grown—and grown beautiful," said Hannes Rassiem.

She bowed her head and then threw it back. "You are not to say that to me! I don't want to hear things you have said a thousand times already. They're just a habit."

"Why, Dima, you are sulking? You are not at all lovely, not at all. But," bending toward her, "you will be lovely one day; beautiful—later—when—"

She did not want to ask, but her eyes, large and dark, with a hesitating fear in their depths, asked for her. *When—?*

"When you've become a woman, Dima, a woman. When you've known love, passion; when you've learned to kiss. You don't know how to yet, Dima—do you—?"

"No," she said, and her voice failed her. "I don't want to, I don't want to."

He reached for her, felt her body trembling and defensive, and an overwhelming tenderness ran through his blood. "Go away!" he said roughly, and moved away to the sofa which stood at the other end of the room. He flung himself down and locked his fingers together. "No, stay, I won't hurt you—the storm is coming—stay with me, my dear."

He lay there looking at her, never taking his eyes off her. They were silent. It became darker still. The heat was like a screw fastening an unbearably tight bond around them. The clock in the next room ticked loudly and insistently, but the soft, rapid tick of the watch in Rassiem's pocket was audible too—it was so quiet. Dima dropped her

arms and gazed at him; he did not move but just continued to watch her. In his eyes there was something like torment, his forehead was damp and gleaming, and slowly his upper lip contracted from his teeth.

"Darling—?" he whispered hoarsely.

Dima held back, still trying to resist: those eyes, that mouth, and that broken voice . . .

"Come—Dima, come—?"

For a second longer she stood in the orange-colored twilight; then the first gust of wind swept against the window, and dust rattled on the panes. There was a flash. And Dima forced herself toward Rassiem as though her feet were bound. He scarcely moved, he lay still, only raising his arms. He caught Dima to him and took possession of her mouth.

At first it seemed to her like a fire, beams and burning wheels turning before her closed eyes, a scorching pain in her breast; it was unbearable, that hungry mouth on hers, taking everything, drawing breath and life and all feeling into it like a whirlpool. Ice cold needles stabbed her neck and back; she was seized with giddiness. She held back—a moment longer—before she must fling herself into this kiss and be overwhelmed.

Then she felt his soft hair in her hands, his warm hands clasping her neck, his firm strong body trembling against her own; she heard his heavy breathing and a strange voice—her voice—stammered something. There was a clap of thunder and she awoke, startled, raised herself, and stared into the dusk. Hail was rattling against the windowpanes, and the gutters were gurgling.

"What was that? What has happened?" she whispered, with trembling lips and chattering teeth.

"A kiss, Dima, that's all. Just a kiss. And a thunderstorm."

"I am afraid, dear. Is it as overpowering as that, a kiss?"

"The first?" He bent to look in her eyes. "Dima? The first? Really?"

And then, since she was silent and withdrawn: "You are so different from what I imagined: sweeter, wilder, more complete; you don't know yourself, Dima."

His hands were upon her again, and his mouth. She raised herself with heavy limbs, of which she was aware as of something new and strange. His hot arm was clasped about her.

"That is the most beautiful part of you, that line along your hips," he said, and his hand slid over her. "That beautiful body of yours—"

It grew lighter in the room. Dima saw herself like some new thing in the mirror; she went slowly nearer, quite close to the glass and looked herself straight in the eyes with a strange curiosity. He smiled.

My body—? thought Dima surprised. Suddenly she understood the word; it resounded, it had suddenly taken form: body—body— She moved across the room and was conscious of the way she moved; she lifted her arms and knew suddenly that this was beautiful: the sweep up from the lifted breast to the finger tips stretched up into the air. She was conscious of herself as a whole—her neck, her breasts, her small knees, that were still trembling. And she was frightened. *Am I like that—is that me?*

"What great big eyes, child! Are you angry with me?"

Angry? thought Dima—*why?* A tiny, timid shiver crept through her.

Rassiem lit a cigarette, walked up and down the room, opened a window. A cool, clean, rain-swept breeze entered, a pungent smell of green wet gardens and spring.

"That's marvelous," he said, breathing deeply. "Will you have tea with me now, Dima?"

She was startled by the matter-of-fact tone of his voice, and forced herself to say quietly, "No, thank you, I must

go now."

She put on her hat. When she saw herself before the mirror with upraised arms she was ashamed of herself. The movement which he was watching seemed so naked. He came behind her, took her in his arms; her mouth was waiting, but he kissed her on the neck, on the pulse which was beating in her throat. Suddenly he released her and pushed her away from him. "Go away—go—" he said hoarsely, adding, since she hesitated: "Go quickly, or—"

As she went out of the door she saw his broad sloping shoulders trembling and his hands pressed nervously against the lid of the piano. His last word sent her away with a shudder, sweet and fearful and of an incredible strangeness.

Hannes Rassiem stood still for a moment longer, then he took a fresh cigarette and went to the window, where there was a clean, fresh coolness; he sighed and stretched himself. Dima appeared outside the front door, her long slender limbs strangely loosened, and her head bowed, which was unusual for her; but under her arm she still clutched the music of *Tristan and Isolde.*

She has not forgotten that, after all, thought Rassiem, and it made him laugh. He watched her go good-humoredly and listened to the pleasant racing of his blood.

Dima went as far as the corner, where she stood still, hesitating. She wanted to think but could not. She stood still again before the placards on the walls of the Schwarzenberg Gardens and stared. A gentle breeze was waving the tops of the trees above the wall now, and a few cool drops fell on Dima's shoulders from the blossoms. She looked down at the white silk of her blouse, which was transparent where the wet drops had fallen.

It was in this blouse, she thought; and in the same moment: *I won't give it back to Gusti.*

She reached home late in the cool of the evening. It

seemed to her as though she had not seen the crooked passages and courtyards for years. She saw as if for the first time an acacia tree that hung its feathery green delicately over the little chapel, a red, everlasting light before the age-blackened Madonna. From the darkness of the passage an entwined couple disengaged themselves. Dima smiled sympathetically.

The family was seated at the round table, busily occupied with the evening meal. Broad, red-cheeked Herr Edlinger, Gusti's betrothed, was munching stolidly, and holding her hand under the table. "Did you get my blouse wet?" asked Gusti immediately, and even Fräulein Sophie was concerned.

"No—I mean, a little; but it hasn't hurt it," said Dima, staring blankly at the dishes held out to her, which contained the inevitable fare—sausage in vinegar and oil with dreary slices of onion strewn over it, eggs, bread and butter. *How absurd that such things should exist,* thought Dima.

"Well, how goes Art, my beauteous sister-in-law?" asked Herr Edlinger, opening the conversation with gallantry. Gusti asked, "Would you like some cheese, Edward? The girl can go and get some." Fräulein Sophie kicked her under the table and frowned. "Perhaps you'd rather have some more sausage? There's so much sausage left, Herr Edlinger!"

"Fanny!" shouted Gusti. "Go and fetch twenty kreuzers' worth of cheese. Here's the money. I'll pay for it."

Fräulein Sophie returned angrily to her novel, which lay open beside her plate. Herr Edlinger, feeling flattered, gazed at Gusti with admiration and continued for the moment to consume sausage.

"You might at least take my blouse off now you're home!" said Gusti reproachfully, looking at her sister with suspicion. What right had she to wear such an arrogant

expression, to eat with her fingers crooked so correctly, and to look with such scorn at the placidly munching Herr Edlinger. "What are you looking at? Take that blouse off! At once!" said Gusti, roused.

Fräulein Sophie raised her head from her book once again and said, "Gusti, you know I won't stand that vulgar tone!" In her excitement she lapsed into dialect. The maid slouched slowly into the room and laid the cheese wrapped in paper before the delighted Herr Edlinger. "Here's twenty-five kreuzers change," she said to Gusti.

"Why only twenty-five?" asked Fräulein Sophie, anxiously. "The cheese cost twenty, you had fifty, that leaves thirty!"

"Oh, never mind, Sophie!" said Gusti grandly.

"No!" Fräulein Sophie placed her plump forefinger on the line she had just read. "What do you mean, never mind? Five kreuzers are five kreuzers; they're hard enough to earn. Aren't I right, Herr Edlinger?"

"Certainly!" he answered ingratiatingly. "Take acting fees, for instance: one gulden twenty for an evening. And what with your tram fares there and back, and ten kreuzers to the concierge, and a beer and a ham sandwich or two, I ask you, what's left?"

"Quite right, Herr Edlinger. Well, where are the five kreuzers, Fanny?"

"The grocer cut a slightly larger piece—it cost twenty-five kreuzers!"

"There you are, are you satisfied?" asked Gusti. "You may go, Fanny! Are you enjoying it, Edward?" She scratched him affectionately behind the ears, and Fräulein Sophie discreetly turned her attention to her book. "Such a small piece of cheese for twenty-five kreuzers!" she murmured thoughtfully after a little while.

In the kitchen the maid started to drone her everlasting Bohemian song. The engaged couple, arms entwined,

withdrew to the sofa. A faint odor of onions and lamp oil hung over the room. Dima looked about her and noticed for the first time the ugly painted walls, the tasteless furniture, the ridiculous white crochet mats everywhere, the cheap vases with no flowers in them, the photographs on the walls, the ugly ornamental plates, and the Japanese paper fans.

"Family life is indeed a joy!" she commented aloud and picked up her piano score. Herr Edlinger, who was ruminatively sucking a cigar, attempted to make conversation: "May one ask what charming piece that is that you are studying?"

"You can't expect her to get a kilo of cheese for twenty-five kreuzers," said Fräulein Gusti, still harping on this unsettled problem. "It wasn't too little; why, there's even a piece left."

"There you are!" said Fräulein Sophie. "I knew it. I knew the cheese would be left, but you always try to play the grand lady."

"Tristan and Isolde," Dima interrupted. She looked down at the music, which seemed to live and burgeon in her ears, to become part of her.

"Ah! Tristan!" said Herr Edlinger respectfully. "There's an opera for you! It positively makes one perspire."

Chapter Eight: SO SORROWFUL AND SO SWEET

THE CAUSE OF ALL THE TROUBLE was Herr Silberling, a small black-haired violinist in the Classics Class. He had lost his heart to Fräulein Lukas, and proceeded to demonstrate the fact in a slightly too pointed manner. He had horrid gray, clammy hands. Fräulein Lukas had boxed his ears soundly in the waiting-room, whereupon he had started to kick up the very devil of a row. He plunged the

whole building into a fever of excitement; attendants rushed out on every floor: Herr Pietsch, the general factotum, smart, worldly-wise Herr Reindl, and worthy old Herr Keller who possessed in addition to three medals the privilege of selling sandwiches. Frau Gibich, leaning excitedly over the banisters, was quite disappointed that the affair had not occurred in her corridor. The Registrar stalked up like a black crane, carrying an empty portfolio under his arm to create an impression of importance. An old lady who had been sitting in the waiting-room, and had been startled by the uproar, emphatically demanded a glass door so that everybody could see into the room and thus prevent a recurrence of such happenings, and for the sake of morality in general. Meanwhile Herr Silberling stood shouting—even his gray, damp hands seemed to shout, "I won't be treated in such a manner by a person like her, not by a person of that sort! indeed I will not!"

Fräulein Lukas, her arms hanging limply by her sides in a strange indifference or tiredness, was pale and silent.

The affair was taken before the Director and disappeared within the green walls of the office, becoming a secret thing only to be discussed in whispers. Herr Lorm, the baritone from Tarnopol, was summoned, the two students Rebner and Haucke, both of whom were studying composition, Eisenfeld, the pianist with large hands, even trumpeter Kohl, whose quiet existence was noticed for the first time. In the school corridors even Rassiem's name was whispered, but Fräulein Lukas was reported to have denied any necessity for summoning him to the proceedings. In the end her scholarship was taken from her and she disappeared from the institution.

"The hussy! It serves her right!" said the baritone Lorm, leaning sternly against the classroom window with a peculiarly dramatic bearing and expression. "Who would have thought it? She seems to have been carrying on with

half the inhabitants of the Conservatoire!"

"But what is going to happen to her now?" asked Gelfius.

"She's got an engagement in Wiener-Neustadt. She'll have plenty of scope there. The garrison, you know!"

Dima and Elis, listening with wide eyes, despised Fräulein Lukas very much; but in their inmost hearts they were troubled by a strange indefinite fear that made them wonder. "How could such a thing happen?" asked Elis of the air. "No one noticed anything peculiar about her; she seemed just the same as all of us."

"To think of having shaken hands with such a creature!" said Dima. "How could any girl fall so low?"

Gelfius opened his mouth, looked at Dima, shut his mouth again, and thumped angrily on the piano.

At this moment Rassiem arrived, and Dima was shaken to the core.

Since that afternoon a silence and a suspense had fallen between them. A wandering of the eyes, a trembling of the hands, that sought and secretly touched each other. Dima had not visited him again. But, if they were left alone for a moment in the classroom or corridor, Hannes Rassiem caught the girl to him and kissed her. During this period she wandered about feeling tired and exhausted and listless and she sang badly. But he was always there, day and night, waiting—

The disappearance of Fräulein Lukas caused a gap in the program for the next musical evening, and the class was waiting anxiously to know who would be chosen as a substitute. Hannes Rassiem wandered about the room gazing at each girl in turn. The untalented little Bach had been twisting her hair into expectant curls in her excitement, and Grete Wied of the alto voice clutched her piano score nervously to her stomach. Dima sat with tight shut mouth, trembling, and digging her nails into her chair.

Rassiem glanced at his long, well-cared-for fingers and announced carelessly, "Fräulein Kerckhoff will take part."

"Me? I am to—?" She stammered, disconcerted, "You really mean me, with my tiny voice?" She longed to kiss Rassiem's hands, but since this was out of the question, she just stood and stared, and said, "I will pull myself together, I will make a success of it."

The class was disgusted; only Gelfius smiled a little in his unkempt beard, and accompanied her songs as delicately as though he were spinning gold with his broad pianist's hands. Even Frau Gibich nodded and scratched her forehead benevolently when Elis told her the great news at the end of the lesson. But Dima remained strangely sullen, and would not shake hands when they parted.

"Are you angry, Dima?" asked Elis, vaguely uneasy. Dima did not answer, but bit her knuckles and ran off. Later she discovered herself waiting, with a troubled conscience, in the hall of the house where Rassiem lived. After a long time he arrived, whistling, his hat on the back of his head, enveloped in the scent of Eau-de-Cologne, cigarettes, and fresh-smelling English soap. He raised his eyebrows and said, "Well—?"

But Dima was speechless. "Why—?" she began, and then had to press her hands to her mouth to prevent herself from screaming.

"Why is the Kerckhoff to sing? Because you don't know enough yet. We don't want to make a fool of ourselves, do we? You are in a bad way, Dima; things can't go on like this."

She bowed her head. The light which fell from the top of the staircase played on her smooth golden-brown neck. He snatched her to him roughly. "My dear, my child! I'm waiting for you—"

He let her go, and she went away, her eyes burning,

tired in every limb, and with strange thoughts turning in her head like garish colored wheels.

But Elis went home through streets that seemed bright and unfamiliar, and even in the cold dark hall of the house there was a little yellow patch of sun, which looked as though it had been dropped there by accident. Elis entered Mamma's room. The windows were open and the broad white curtains billowed in the breeze. She laid her head in Mamma's small hands on the silken coverlet and said softly that she was very happy, very happy and frightfully excited.

She sent for her dressmaker and ordered a dress of the softest white silk with wide flowing sleeves and a golden girdle close beneath her breasts.

"Romantic!" said the dressmaker. "Rather too romantic!"

She held the drawing which Elis had made close to her eyes and then at arm's length. "No trimming?" she asked, disappointed. "Just a buckle on the belt? No? Nothing? Like a sack?" She packed up her fashion magazines and departed. "You'll have just a little embroidery at the neck?" she suggested at the door; but Elis was not to be moved.

She produced her program at the next lesson, and Rassiem tore his hair and said, "Ridiculous! *Der Leiermann, Im Dorfe, Der Wegweiser;* each one more miserable than the other! Why not the whole *Winterreise* while you're about it? A gay, bright little girl like you!"

You tenor! thought Dima, who was sitting exasperated in a corner; and Elis secretly agreed.

"You will sing *Heideröslein!*" Rassiem decided. "It suits you and your eyes perfectly." And he took her bowed face in his warm hand. Then she relented, and weakened, and undertook to sing *Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt;* but she would not give up *Der Wegweiser.* And she said to Dima:

"What rot he does talk! He thinks he's making an impression, old Herr Kammersänger!" They both laughed—light, scornful, girlish laughter, in which neither of them succeeded in deceiving the other.

Surprisingly soon the great evening came round and Elis stood shivering before the mirror, looking at herself in her soft white dress, with her light brown hair plaited, as usual, in its long, smooth plaits.

"Affected," said Elis sternly to her picture in the mirror; but it began to smile and slowly lifted its head on its slender white neck, and one could not help thinking that it was rather like the picture of a little fairy princess.

The meager light of a spring evening lingered in the alleyways; people and things moved hurriedly and unheeding past the window of her carriage; everything seemed confused and dreamlike.

There was the building, and here was her music in her trembling hands, which were clumsily paying the chauffeur; here was the stairway with its yellow gas jets; here the greenroom and here zealous little Herr Reindl, taking her coat as though she were a prima donna.

"Exaggerated!" somebody in a corner commented aloud when the white dress came to light. Elis made an effort to rouse herself and look in the direction of the comment. It was Fräulein Mertens from the advanced Piano class, who was sitting at a grand piano, armed with her spectacles, practicing scales. Herr Silberling, in a badly fitting dress suit, was standing before the tall mirror, patting a curl into place with his gray hands. Herr Reindl attentively thrust into Elis's hands a program on which the blue letters merged into one another indistinctly; there was her name. Her mind a blank, she stared into an atmosphere that was seething and moving, as the air dances in the summertime over the hop fields; and on top of it all she felt so wretchedly cold.

"Are you excited too?" she asked of two vague white shapes, floating in the chaos, which had announced that they were going to sing Brahms duets. "No, not very, but I feel so rotten," replied a voice. The white shape came nearer and materialized into a stiff dress, on the top of which was perched a small, frightened face. Fräulein Mertens, raging up and down the piano in diminished sevenths, pronounced from experience, "That will all go when you get on the platform; it's only like that beforehand."

"Nervous? That's not allowed!" confirmed Herr Silberling, applying a little lick to his curl. "Afraid of those people out there? What do they know about it? Well, then!"

"The chief thing is to feel warm," Herr Reindl pronounced. "Keep moving about."

But now Elis felt faint and could no longer distinguish things clearly. Her teeth were chattering so loudly that she was ashamed of herself. Then Gelfius appeared and held out a broad warm hand to which she clung in desperation.

Herr Reindl carried a chair out onto the platform and for a moment a cheerful buzzing warmth came from the hall through the open doors; then the bell rang inexorably.

"Courage!" said Gelfius and carried off the girls with the Brahms duets. "Supposing I dry up—heaven help me, if I dry up!" cried one of them in anguish at the door. Outside there was a rustling and then silence; thin notes arose. Elis stood at the window, freezing, freezing . . .

Suddenly Hannes Rassiem appeared; Herr Reindl acted valet and helped him out of his overcoat. The students bowed, and he came toward Elis and took her hands. Immediately the whole room was full of him, of his sweeping stride, his cheerful, lovely voice, his pale eyes. He laughed and Elis felt the blood flowing rich and warm through her heart and cheeks.

"Doesn't the child look charming, doesn't she look just too sweet!" he said, and pushed her in front of the mirror. "Such a charming creature couldn't but be a success, eh? Well then, there's no need to be frightened." He thrust his arm in hers and pulled her through the green padded door into the anteroom, which separated the hall from the greenroom. Outside the Brahms girls were concluding to a thin scatter of applause.

Herr Reindl ran eagerly to and fro; again there came the warm buzz from outside, and then Herr Silberling mounted the steps to the hall, confident of success. Herr Reindl softly closed the door behind him. "It's your turn next, Fräulein Kerckhoff," he announced.

"Are you cold? Is your throat dry?" asked Rassiem. He stroked her cheeks, pulled her to him and put his arm about her shoulders. "And now I'm going to chase away my little girl's stage fright," he said, holding her warm and close to him. Then everything was still, and the notes of the violin outside wove themselves into the silence like a delicate golden network. Elis closed her eyes and was suffused with an infinite lightness. Like an immense wave the happiness of those moments overwhelmed her, lasting just one more second—just one more second—

The sound of the violin was suddenly silenced, and it was over. Rassiem let Elis go with a squeeze. Herr Silberling came from the platform, hurrying back again to bow to the applause which fell upon him like a cloudburst. He smiled ingratiatingly and patted his curl. His perspiring face wore an expression of complete happiness.

"Fräulein Kerckhoff, please," said Herr Reindl. Everything was lost in a confusion of people, lights, and doors. Wasn't Gelfius there? "Gelfius—?" she asked in a pathetic, little, broken voice. "Keep up your courage!" someone growled. "She's pale enough," remarked someone, and someone else called, "She hasn't got her music; don't for-

get your music."

"She sings from memory," she heard Gelfius say. The door in front of her was opened. "From memory? That's fine!" somebody said behind her. She was thrust onto the platform by a little push from Gelfius, who growled, "How much longer are you going to wait at the door?"

At every door—she thought, and had to smile even in her confusion. And already she was outside.

Feeble applause rose to greet her. Instinctively she made an awkward curtsy, and then there was only a strange rustling from the heaving mass down below; then Gelfius started playing and it became perfectly still. *It looks like a flower-bed,* thought Elis, *a flower bed in the wind.*

But she was already singing.

The Director sat in front, and his bald head reflected the light of the chandeliers above him most disconcertingly. *"Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt, weiss was ich leide"* —Was Dima there? *Oh, God! what am I thinking of; I must pull myself together— "Allein und abgetrennt von aller Freude"—And Rassiem? where are you? Where are you?* Suddenly she was conscious of her voice, sounding so small and lonely in the great room. *Wrong breathing,* she thought, and tried to concentrate. An ugly old woman was sitting there not listening at all, but looking with a disagreeable expression at her nails. *She must be made to listen,* thought Elis, breathing deeper and singing more loudly—*"Ach, der mich liebt und kennt, ist in der Weite"* —There was Rassiem, right at the back near the promenade, leaning critically against a pillar. *"Es schwindelt mir"* —*Darling,* look at me, look at me—

And the song was finished.

The applause was half-hearted; down below heads which looked colorless in the light moved to and fro with a rustling sound, making one feel giddy. Elis looked down at the drooping folds of her silken sleeves, which were

trembling. Then her heart soared up with her first notes, and it was as though the hall were shrouded in a green veil. She bowed her head, lost in herself, and a sweet intoxication took possession of her, as it sometimes did at home when she was singing in the dark with no one listening.

Rassiem leaned forward in astonishment as a tired, listless voice began: *"Was vermeid ich denn die Wege, die die andern Wandrer gehn?"* Rassiem frowned; what on earth was the meaning of this? The voice was weary, tired to death. *"Suche mir versteckte Stege durch verschneite Felsenhöhn,"* and she slowly raised her head with eyes wide open but unseeing. Something inexplicable ran through the hall, and every sound was stilled by this voice, which now rose and rose, until a great, white loneliness seemed to grow from the sound of it; it flagged and rose again, was distraught, and then passed on to the inevitable ending with a strange peacefulness.

"Einen Weiser seh ich stehen,
Unverrückt vor meinem Blick,
Eine Strasse muss ich gehen,
Die noch keiner ging zurück—
Die noch keiner ging zurück."

Gelfius was bent over the piano with tightly closed lips. His hands molded the accompaniment to Elis's own interpretation of the song: that ending, which began with its extended discord and decreased toward its inevitable goal, adding there two consolatory chords like a soft epilogue.

Elis stood with her head bowed, gazing blindly before her; her face was quite pale and was full of pain and exhaustion. The hall was silent for a moment or two, then sighed and burst into astonished, uncomprehending applause. The Director in the first row removed the perspiration from his bald head with a large handkerchief and

said quite audibly, "What talent! What expression! What intelligence! And with it all, she's a mere child. It's unbelievable!"

Slowly Rassiem walked down the center gangway, his pale eyes with their dark pupils fixed on Elis. Something hot brushed his hand. Dima, pale as though in a fever, was sitting strained to breaking-point. With her hot bare arm she pressed against him as though she were trying to hold him. He answered the pressure gently and passed on. Elis saw him sit down behind the Director. She awoke, smiled, and began *"Das Heideröslein."* She sang it softly, shyly, on a muted, childlike note. But the end was sad and faded pensively away, as though there was a secret behind it, something incomprehensible: *"Musst' es eben leiden—"* And her eyes asked a question at the last rallentando, *"Röslein auf der Heiden."*

There was a burst of applause, and a few enthusiasts permitted themselves to shout "Bravo." They thought Elis talented and very pretty. "But!" said the Director reflectively, when the applause was over, "but she really has very little voice! Goodness knows how she achieves her effect." Some of the piano students thought her mad with her plaits and her dress, and thought her way of singing most peculiar. Not to sing the *Heideröslein* roguishly! And why with scarcely any voice?

"Because she hasn't got one," said the little Bach simply. Grete Wied enlarged on this: "She does it with her beautiful eyes! Did you all see how she flirted with him? And her G was badly produced." Then they all trooped into the greenroom to congratulate her.

Elis stood there smiling absently, holding two poor, shabby white carnations in her hand, which Gelfius had obtained through some mysterious means and given to her without a word. This was his own queer way of showing his appreciation and it moved Elis so much that she felt

like crying. Many people clustered round her, talking to her. Her fellow students planted soft, damp kisses on her cheeks. Now that it was all over she was trembling and had a bad headache; she longed for the green light of her mother's room, for her old house-frock, for the sofa on which she spent half-dreaming the nights of her watch over the sickbed.

"She is tired, leave her alone," said Gelfius, who was attentively watching her pale face. "Don't chatter so much; go into the hall and listen while the Mertens is playing and try and learn what rhythm is!"

"The *Wegweiser* was fine," he said as soon as they were alone, "particularly the end. That not being able to escape from death."

"From suicide," said Elis.

"Suicide? Why suicide? What on earth gave you that idea?" he asked.

"I feel it like that, I just know it," she said, and gazed into the light which shone white on her face. Gelfius struck a chord on the piano. "The first song was rotten—why?"

Elis shrugged her shoulders. "You know very well that I generally do sing rottenly. It's only every now and then that something comes over me, when I am alone and a little faint." She was silent and thoughtful, and then spoke again, feeling chilled. "But tonight, in front of all those people—I don't know what it was. It seems shameless to me now, to give oneself away so."

The door opened with a crash, and Rassiem burst into the room, hands outstretched, beaming and enchanted with the success of his pupil. Dima slipped in behind him and stood silently near the window with feverish eyes, biting her lips.

"My dear child, what pleasure you have given me," said Rassiem, holding Elis's hands tightly. He sat down

and pulled her close to him, between his knees, like a small child.

"Who knows what this child isn't capable of?" he asked. "Look at me, you little fairy princess! I must look into your eyes. Who knows what surprises may not be lurking there?" He looked up at her, as she stood before him, bending down her head to gaze and gaze at him, in silence—

Dima stood at the window, Gelfius at the piano. Outside someone was playing Chopin. Rassiem kept tight hold of Elis's hands and looked into her eyes, and slowly his smile faded into a strange earnestness . . .

Suddenly there was a crash. They started.

"I'm sorry," said Dima. "How clumsy of me."

She had thrust her fist through the window; it was still clenched and trembling, and the blood was running down her bare, brown arm.

Chapter Nine: THE DARK SHADOW

ONE EVENING AS ELIS WAS SITTING IN HER ROOM absorbed in a song of Hugo Wolf's, the housemaid came and announced that her mistress was awake. "Yes?" said Elis. "All right. I'll come along," and was immediately lost again in her music. But the maid stood waiting. "Fräulein, Fräulein Elisabeth, she is so strange, so excited—"

"Who is?" Elis started. "Mamma excited—?" and she went quickly to her mother's room. The light in the passage was only half on, making it look dreary. The large old peasant wardrobes looked forbidding in the half-light, with their deep black shadows and all the color drained out of their painted flowers.

Mamma was alone, but she was talking, loudly and rapidly, and now and then laughing, Elis was startled and listened for a minute, a long, long minute at the door

before she turned the handle.

Yes. There lay Mamma with feverishly bright eyes, her hands roving restlessly over the bedclothes, like small white trapped animals.

"You didn't recognize him?" asked Mamma hurriedly in a strangely prim and childish voice. "You didn't recognize old Uncle Peter? Oh, he was so funny! Don't you remember, Annemarie? How we children laughed at him! The way he used to come riding along, with his umbrella up?" She laughed and her laughter was like tinkling glass. "Do you remember how Edward mimicked him? He was only a year older than you and died shortly afterward." She thought for a moment in silence and looked searchingly at Elis. "No," she said sadly. "Elis—why, you are Elis. I had mixed you up. I thought my brother and sister were with me; no, it's Liesl," she said, amazed, and her eyes became conscious for a moment and tender, and the little hands searched for something.

"The doctor!" whispered Elis. The maid went quickly and softly away. "Mother—" said Elis, and tried to calm the restless hands, but they circled on feverishly over the silk coverlet.

"The raspberry bed by the stream, in the hot sun, there were snakes there—ugh!" she cried loudly. "Ugh! snakes! In the summer Betti had a child. I could not understand it. The coachman was responsible. Horrid! I couldn't understand it."

Elis sat beside the bed gazing fixedly at Mamma's face, watching it grow slowly smaller and stranger, with blue shadows about the nostrils. She listened to Mamma's voice, the strange voice of a small girl playing in the meadows, laughing and innocent.

Now it is beginning, she thought; *now she is beginning to die—*

"Then Papa hanged himself," said Mamma, and she

laughed her brittle laugh about this too. "It was so funny. He was hanging in the stable, and no one dared cut him down."

"Who hanged himself, Mamma?" asked Elis hurriedly.

"Our father, Annemarie. You went into the stable and stood with your fingers in your mouth in astonishment. Then Johann cut him down, you know, the man who was responsible for Betti's child."

"Did Grandfather—kill himself, Mamma? I never knew that."

"Grandfather?" asked Mamma, opening wide her distraught eyes. "Who's there? Who is it? You, Elis?" she said, relieved. "But, Elis, didn't you know? There was so much trouble in the family. The Reinhards were never quite sane. You aren't yourself, Elis, my poor dear Liesl," said Mamma with a smile that was startling in its clear-sightedness. "You're only seventeen!" said Mamma, as Elis's heart contracted painfully, "but what will happen to you later? You are so nervous and so exhausted, and always having such headaches. Yes, you are seventeen now. With me it only began after I was married. After my first child, you know. It was dead and so ugly.

"Ugly!" cried Mamma aloud, becoming feverish again. "I didn't want to have another—it is all so coarse and ugly. And you—you did not come to me easily, Elis. I was very fond of Papa, my dear, fonder of him than of you! Don't be angry with me for that. And he became unhappy with me. Now he is upstairs working—Elis—isn't he, he is upstairs working?"

"Yes, Mother."

"He mustn't come down again, promise me, my dear. Only, when it is all over. All over—" she said, and breathed deeply; this produced a terrifying rattle in her chest, something quite new. Elis forced back a sob.

"Elis," said Mamma very softly. "I've so often thought

that this house was ill; the walls, the furniture, all of it is old and ill. Have you never noticed it? Why, it says in the Bible that there are houses which are sick of leprosy. Leprosy! Ugh!" she cried, so loudly and clearly that Elis was startled and took her small hands and clasped them firmly. Then Mamma lifted her hands with an effort to her eyes, and gazed at them searchingly and fixedly, as though they were strange, unfamiliar things. "Yes. Well, it's all over," she said quietly, as though she had seen as much in her tiny, strange, transparent hands, and her face shrank. She turned her head a little to one side and was silent, her eyes closed.

Later the doctor arrived, felt her pulse, lifted up her translucent eyelids and exposed in a frightening way the deep-blue, expressionless, dying eyes. He listened to her breathing, which was regular and quick, and he spoke softly and carefully to Elis.

"The release," he said, and placed for a moment an unpleasantly warm but sympathetic hand on Elis's shoulder. "Pneumonia—tomorrow the heart will weaken—" He did not finish the sentence. "One can only wait now. No more morphia. She is unconscious and out of pain." At the door he added, "If—anything should happen—I shall be at home." And on the staircase outside: "She's had three years of suffering—" He concluded with a tactfully silent flourish of his gray felt hat and went down the smooth, worn steps. Elis watched him absently. There was a queer, burning, dry emptiness inside her. Suddenly she thought, *Mamma is dying.* It seemed to her as if she had shouted the words, for the thought was so loud and startling. Mamma was lying in the same position as before, her eyes closed and her face the small, peaked face of a child. Her skin was so smooth and taut that it shone green in the light of the sickroom lamp. Her breathing was hurried and there was a faint rattle in it.

"Fräulein? Fräulein Elisabeth?" asked the maidservant, looking at Elis with large eyes brimming with tears. She raised her small white apron to her face and wept in loud, childish sobs. *Crying*—thought Elis, amazed—*crying? How easy for her.* Distraught, she stroked the girl's heaving shoulders, then clasped the back of her own head in which a painful confusion was raging, and her throat which was burning and contracted. "I must go up to Father," she said mechanically.

They had forgotten to turn on the lights on the staircase. The night sky outside the little staircase window looked red and inflamed, a hot and feverish sky, it seemed. Elis groped along the cold marble of the dying wrestler outside the studio. The marble muscles writhed and twisted beneath her hands. She took a deep breath in an effort to rouse herself. It seemed to her that she must be asleep and dreaming, for in her dreams she sometimes felt this powerful body beneath her hands.

She opened the door softly and a blaze of light streamed out to meet her. The sculptures in the outer room stood white and silent. Father was not there. The thousand-candle-power lamp was burning harshly in the ceiling; the glare of it was painful. In the inner room water was dripping softly and regularly from a tap, and in the center of the room stood a large and ungainly plaster figure, wrapped in damp cloths. The silence was so deep and intense that her father's breathing was audible from behind a gray curtain. Elis stepped softly up to the curtain and carefully pulled it a little to one side. A small room had been partitioned off here and furnished in a Bohemian way with cushions and skins and rugs. There was a low table littered with empty teacups, ash trays, modeling tools, and books piled high on top of each other. A light had been led across to the table and fitted with a primitive shade of blue packing-paper; it cast a circle of

light into the soft surrounding darkness. In the beam of light lay a piece of paper on which a shoulder had been sketched over and over again, a strong, muscular shoulder, braced up and pressed against something, a shoulder lifting a heavy weight. Beside the drawing lay Father's hand, limp and dusty. He had fallen back in his chair and was asleep with his chin in the air. Dust was in his hair and beard, and at his temples the blue veins played like snakes.

As Elis looked at him it seemed to her that in a moment she would be able to cry. She dropped the curtain and softly withdrew, overcome by a strange lassitude as though after some great exertion. Slowly she walked between the silent statues in the two rooms, and down the dark stairs. Mortar rattled in a wall, but apart from this the house was unnaturally silent, for Mamma's cries and her moaning were stilled.

After this Elis sat beside Mamma's bed, her head filled with a pain that seemed huge enough to fill the whole world. Mamma's breathing was short and racing, racing, racing; her blue, transparent eyelids were not quite closed; the slits revealed eyes that were already lifeless. But her hands, restlessly circling over the cover, were still alive, though they too seemed to shrivel and grow strange. In the corner by the stove sat the maidservant with red, tear-stained face, fighting against sleep; from time to time her head would sink forward and she would wake trembling like an animal.

"You go to bed," said Elis. "I'll stay here."

"Aren't you afraid, Fräulein Elisabeth?" whispered the girl. "Oh! I am so frightened, so frightened."

No, thought Elis slowly—*afraid? of this?* She seemed so familiar with it; she had so often thought of it.

"Do you never think of it? Of death?" she asked softly.

"No, Fräulein."

"No. Of course not," said Elis, and after a little while, "No, I'm not afraid of that—" Yet it sounded as though she were asking a question. Then she was alone, and confused hours crawled haltingly through the room. Eventually the morning came, dim and green, heralded by a cool rustling in the branches which entered the open window like the taking of a deep breath. Elis stood up, feeling giddy, and put out the light. A soft sweet twittering came from the garden, and ceased again, drowsily; a single star was still shining in the sky which hung green and low over roof and garden; the window ledge was damp. Elis laid her hands on the moist coolness outside. She felt listless and exhausted from the raging pain in her head. Slowly the green outside paled and a reddish sun rose. For a long time Elis stood at the window, watching. Doors banged in the house down below, and a clock struck. With a sudden start Elis turned round; Mamma's eyes, large and wide open, were fixed upon her.

"Mamma, Mamma, do you know me?" she whispered, flinging herself down by the bed, and gazing eagerly, excitedly into those eyes, which regarded her so clearly, so strangely, so knowingly. "Mamma—what are you trying to tell me?"

But Mamma was silent, and slowly two large tears trickled from the corners of the blue eyes down the strange little face, until Elis gently kissed them away. But when she raised her head, Mamma's eyes were half closed again, and stricken, and even her little hands were still and slowly dying. But for many hours her breath continued to race. There was a constant whispering at the door, but no one entered, not even Father. In the afternoon, when it was hot and still, the sound of his mallet could be heard upstairs, and the crash of falling stone. Sitting by Mamma's bed, Elis lost all sense of time. The doctor, when he came, had no idea what to say. He missed the weeping

relatives, grouped around the sickbed, craving sympathy. Every word one addressed to this pale, listless child sitting there, dry-eyed, just smiling gently and remotely—every word seemed to echo fantastically from the walls. So he just made a few stiff marionette-like movements, mechanically consulted his watch, and said, "This evening at the latest." At this Elis merely smiled, and he left, completely at a loss.

Elis continued to wait. The evening brought with it a sky of soft rosy mist. The breeze billowed cool and faintly scented with lilac, in the white curtains. Imperceptibly Mamma raised her head, a few drops of blood trickled in a thin stream from her mouth over her cheeks, her breathing ceased. That was all.

Elis still waited, holding Mamma's hand. Then, since nothing more happened, she let it fall, and it slid down—a thing, a strange object. She breathed deeply, smoothed her hands over her head that was tormenting her with violent pain, and softly opened the door. She walked down the passage in which the servants stood whispering and staring at her.

"It's all over," she said in a parched voice. "But don't go in. I'm going to fetch Father."

Upstairs, at the studio door, she pressed her hand for a moment against the cool stone arms of the wrestler; the sound of a mallet came from within. She hesitated for a long second, and then thrust the door open. The thousand-candle-power lamp was burning white and harsh. Father, in a white dusty overall, was raging with uplifted mallet over a huge block of stone. His high, smooth forehead was covered with large beads of perspiration. Elis, suddenly faint, walked toward him through the resounding whiteness as though she were walking along a narrow bridge which led to no shore. Father did not notice her until she stood close beside him; he glanced up, small

splinters of marble hanging in his beard and hair. He stared at Elis, who stood strangely erect and commanding before him, unable to speak. Then the mallet clattered to the floor.

"I'm coming—I'm coming," he said. He sounded distraught. At the door he hesitated. "How—how does she look?" he asked breathlessly.

"Young and very still, Father."

"Was—it—difficult?"

"No," said Elis, "it was—really—nothing, Father."

He busied himself with clay and plaster and implements. "One must make a death-mask," he said automatically, and left the room, a small white figure among all his huge white, silent creations.

He stopped at Mamma's door and said softly, "She has left us all alone, dear." Elis looked at his strangely bowed shoulders in their dusty artist's overall, and then she went into her room and was able to cry a little. But this turned her headache into a raging torment.

As she felt mechanically in her drawer for the Eau-de-Cologne, she touched the box containing the morphia ampoules for Mamma's injections. She looked at the small round, glass things, embedded in their wool in straight rows like little soldiers. *No one will need these any more,* she thought, and almost simultaneously: *One could get rid of one's headache—*

She was a little frightened and her heart beat fast as she took out the syringe. She thought of Mamma's sister who had been a morphia addict and had died a miserable death, a fact which had never been spoken of above a whisper. "Morphia addict—" said Elis to the mirror and smiled weakly, as she sometimes did when she had been singing too much.

She broke open an ampoule, filled the syringe, and pushed up her sleeve. It was strange to make an injection

with only one hand, one trembling hand. She put the needle to her skin, pushed it in, and squeezed the syringe. A tiny weal formed. Then she lay down on the sofa. Her heart, which was beating fast, gradually calmed down. At first she was conscious of its dull beating, then all sound dissolved into the distance; even the clock stopped ticking. A great nausea overwhelmed her and drifted away like a cloud. The pain in her head became stiff, frozen, it seemed. Then she felt herself swelling up, lifted up, quite light, higher, higher, without any weight at all, nothing. She slept.

She was awakened by the gentle thud of a door, by steps, voices, a strange unrest which filled the house and penetrated through the walls. She felt sick and apathetic; there was an empty, burned-out feeling in her head; her tongue was as dry as a thick piece of wood in her burning mouth; her hands had a strange, greasy, swollen feeling; her thoughts twisted themselves into a knot like worms.

It was broad daylight; the sunlight mixed unappetizingly with the yellow light of the lamp, which was still burning. Elis raised herself, and with great difficulty lifted a heavy, limp arm and turned out the light. On the table lay the syringe with the broken fragments of the ampoule.

Never again—never again, thought Elis dully as she carefully removed the traces. She could hardly walk; a dreadful thirst assailed her. She slipped out into the passage to the bathroom. Under the stream of water she revived a little, holding out her face and drinking with eager mouth from the water as it poured down. Then she crept away again.

From an old peasant wardrobe in the passage she took her confirmation dress; it was soft and long and black; it made her look pale and grown up and imparted new lights to her hair. Then she went up to Father's door. It was quiet inside. She waited a little, mechanically stroking the smooth limbs of the vanquished wrestler, and as she

stood there before this locked door, fondling a block of sculptured stone, a feeling of extreme loneliness overcame her. As there was no sound of movement within, she went downstairs and out of the house.

She gazed up at the dark gray façade of the walls, with its abundance of old-fashioned curves and artifices; the chill breath of the hall came from the entrance. Now Mamma was dead, but the house was still sick, sick of the plague, Mamma had said.

Elis emerged from the shadow of the street into the noise and the daylight, hailed a taxi, and told the driver without thinking, "To Schönbrunn."

Everything was bathed in brilliant, afternoon sunshine; everyone was walking briskly and gaily. Every sound seemed intensified, every color glaring. Outside the town the front gardens of the villas, with their flower beds and rosebushes, were so jubilant that it was painful. The square in front of the castle seemed unnaturally large; the fountains sparkled harshly. In the avenues the shadows were cold and intensely black, and beyond, in an atmosphere that trembled and shimmered like glass, stretched the endless perspective of the flower beds. There were red flowers that were like a shout, and miniature people walking along the brilliant green, straight paths that dwindled to nothing in the distance between their borders of white statues. A fountain played noisily; pale, dim marble bodies, misted with green, towered one above the other like clouds.

If only one could sit here forever, alone like this and empty of thought, with just the sound of quiet rippling water and the singing of birds for company. One soiled oneself with thoughts, dreams, and desires; they left one with a hatred of oneself and of reality. There was music, of course, and that one drank in with an indecent eagerness. Gelfius, who seemed to understand a little of all this,

had called it dilettantism and a disgrace. Mamma was dead, and yet one had been unable to cry; there had been something almost disappointing in death. One had even sunk to the degradation of morphia. And one was only seventeen.

Elis lingered by the small pond in which the sea lion was enjoying himself, raising his sly face to the surface, and turning and tumbling. His stomach glistened white through the water. He lay on a stone in the sun and laughed. He laughed—Elis could see it quite plainly.

Then her thoughts returned with a bound to the old painful theme. One was only seventeen and already everything seemed old and worn out. One seemed to know everything and to be able to see through everything. All but one thing. The great thing. The one, eagerly awaited great experience. That which alone had color and resonance and novelty.

Love.

Suddenly her thoughts were pierced by a penetrating stare of mingled age-old care and contempt. She looked about her, and found herself standing in the monkey house before a chimpanzee, who was hugging a deformed baby to her breast, and staring blankly and wretchedly in front of her. Elis smiled, slowly and with sympathy. A keeper came in and clicked his fingers and made much of the chimpanzee; she would not look at him, but only gazed at her baby.

"It's a month old," he said readily, "but it won't last much longer. They all get consumption. Every year she loses one. We've never been able to rear one yet. Well, well, it makes her sad now, poor Gretl. An animal is more upset at the time than later."

He spoke with a strong county accent. Elis gave him a krone. The ape stared and stared. And there, touched by the look in that animal's eyes, Elis was at last able to cry.

Chapter Ten: THIS NEW, WONDERFUL THING

SINCE MORNING HANNES RASSIEM, possessed by the devil himself, had been racing his car in a cloud of dust and petrol fumes about the suburban streets. Now, angrily sounding his horn, he braked furiously before a small black figure walking in a curious zigzag fashion in the middle of the road, and making not the slightest attempt to get out of his way.

"Elis," he shouted, angry and mystified, when the car had stopped. "Whatever is the matter with you, girl? Have you started wandering about dead drunk in broad daylight?"

She looked at him with wide, confused eyes and thought in apathetic content, *I've been looking for you—it was you I had to find.*

"I'm tired," she said, leaning on the gray bodywork of the car.

Rassiem, seeing her small, haggard face and the dusty black dress, was filled with a compassion which soothed him. "Come, come, you don't look well; are you feeling ill?"

"Yes."

"I'll drive you home!" He jumped out and lifted the light figure into the car.

"Don't drive me home, please don't drive me home."

"What's the matter, Elis, what on earth is wrong?"

"Nothing," she said, "only—my mother is dead—"

Rassiem, embarrassed, and unable to think of anything to say, put his hands round her face; his hands were warm.

"You are very kind," said Elis after a pause, and gently and with a marvelously shy gesture, kissed his hand. She felt suddenly very tired and faint.

What on earth shall I do with her? he thought, gazing

helplessly at the long, low, yellow walls of the inn and the chestnuts in the street and the tramlines. There he was with his car and his feverish restlessness, and there in the car was this poor little distraught creature. She kept his hand clasped tight in both hers, which soothed him strangely.

"Would you like to come with me to my villa at Rodaun?"

Elis nodded. He started the car, and they set off more slowly than before because it was obvious that Elis could not stand great speed. She closed her eyes and abandoned herself to the air, which streamed swift and cool over her face. But when Rassiem turned to look at her after a while he saw that she was asleep; and he drove even more slowly still, feeling more than a little ridiculous.

In Rodaun his man, Berger, was pottering about the garden on his crooked legs, watering the flowers in the front of the house. As the car drew up throbbing he quickly pulled open the garden gate, dashed to the garage, ran excitedly into the house, and reappeared. Berger was entirely composed of a series of little explosions of willing and eager service. One explosion caught light from another, and the result was a noisy chain of occupation.

The car came to a stop. Rassiem jumped out, bent low over Elis and touched her gently. Scarcely waking, she murmured something incomprehensible like a child, and putting her arms round Rassiem's neck and nestling her head against his shoulder, fell asleep again. He smiled, touched and embarrassed, and carried her into the house.

Berger, whom nothing ever surprised, arranged some large, gay silk cushions, pushed up a rocking-chair, brought some cigarettes for Rassiem, and after an inquiring glance at Rassiem's hands removed the brandy bottle. Directly afterward he was heard turning on the shower in the bathroom; but since Rassiem did not come, it was

shortly silenced and Berger allowed the many and various noises of his zeal to die away.

Rassiem watched Elis as she slept. She looked like a child with her small, tender mouth and her long, dark lashes. From time to time she quivered like a sleeping animal and a small, anxious furrow deepened between her brows.

"Berger!" said Rassiem half aloud, and Berger was there. "Berger, isn't she sweet?"

Berger expressed his agreement.

"Her mother has just died," said Rassiem thoughtfully. "She'll cry when she wakes. What shall we do with her?"

"We must comfort her," decided Berger, "and then we must give her a little red wine—she doesn't look well!"

"Yes, Berger, bring some wine and keep close by." After this he sat for a long time bowed over Elis, marvelously soothed by her gentle breathing and the childish hand, which he held fast in his, warm with sleep and now and then twitching. He thought of Maria, who was goodness knows where in the dim distance, up to some mischief no doubt, but giving no sign of life; and of Dima too he thought, and of the hunger for her that often beset and oppressed him.

A violent twitching agitated Elis's forehead. She opened large eyes still confused by dreams, looked at him, and after starting slightly to find his face so close, she smiled.

"When I was a boy," said Rassiem immediately, as though it were something he must not forget to say, "when I was a boy I once found a little sick squirrel. It couldn't climb. So I brought it home. It let me nurse it and wasn't in the least shy. It was particularly sweet when it had been asleep; with its head on one side, and its tail between its paws, it looked just like a child. Father had no patience with the little creature. But I was delighted with it. I was only a little boy—"

"Yes?" said Elis. "A little boy—isn't that funny? I can't imagine you as a little boy. Little," she repeated, after a while, closing her eyes, "and fair—"

"One forgets these things completely, and suddenly they reappear, the scent of them comes back to you, the scent of damp foliage lying in the sun and slowly drying, and the warm feeling— Oh! what nonsense!" He stopped abruptly and lit a fresh cigarette.

"And what happened to the little squirrel?"

"Oh! that? Vanished. Disappeared from the stable. I had made it a little nest in the stable, very nice and comfortable, and one day it had just vanished," he said, annoyed.

Elis could imagine him as a little fair-haired boy standing before the empty cage, unable to comprehend the ingratitude of nature. "Where was that?" she asked softly. "In Denmark?"

"Yes, that was in Denmark—in Denmark—" he said, and then slowly he began to tell her about it, his hands still holding hers, soothing and being soothed.

Elis looked at him while he raked up these old memories, refurbishing them for her benefit so that she should not cry, should not think of Mamma. She looked at his lashes, which were so long that they threw a shadow on his cheeks and she thought, *How kind you are.*

Once upon a time there was a farmhouse, with white walls and dark beams and paneling and primitive carvings; its roof was red, not light red like some tiled roofs, but brownish and overgrown with lichen at the edges. There was a sundial and dogs lying about in the yard. They were called Thora, Troll, and Gent. Gent was a silly white fox terrier with a black spot over his left eye. He had to be shot later because he would go out on his own and chase black game, which he would bring home and carry into the kitchen and drop at Mademoiselle

Thorsten's feet. There was no mother, only a tombstone covered with inscriptions which it was one's unpleasant duty to visit occasionally with flowers. And a silent father, who wore huge boots and went riding over the fields. On one occasion when one was very small and was standing in the gateway, he came riding straight out of the great, red setting sun.

There was a little wooden church, with a bell that could be heard far away over the countryside, away across the dike as far as the Strait. Immediately behind the house the birch wood began; it was beautiful beyond description, and was full of black game and hazel-hens and small, dark red mushrooms, which smelt deliciously earthy, and there were horses, horses . . .

But at this point, with a discreet knock at the door, Berger appeared and respectfully observed, "We ought to give her some red wine and ask her if she would like anything to eat, and then we should like to clean her shoes because they are very dirty." He made a perfect bow and poured out the wine.

Elis laughed and said, astonished, "I'm dreadfully hungry, I haven't eaten anything for a long time, not for two days, I believe."

At which Berger immediately darted off, as though he had been stung by a tarantula.

"It's strange," said Rassiem. "I haven't talked to anyone about these things for years. In fact, I don't believe I have ever spoken of them. One forgets it all at the theater, what with one thing and another, but I should like to tell you all sorts of things; you are such a wonderful listener; one just talks to your eyes. Then one finds oneself back among all those old simple things; finds oneself—"

There was an overwhelming, startling sweetness in being addressed so intimately by him. It caught her breath. The calm depth of it seemed deep enough to drown in. He

was standing before a mirror looking at himself. "Well, forty years have slipped past me—forty years—an old play-actor. And up there in Denmark the same old house, the church, the fields, the wood, the dike, the horses are all still there. And the fair-haired boys are still the same. One ought to have a child of one's own. Did you know that I had lost one child?" he asked of his reflection, that had wrinkles at its temples, and lines under its eyes.

He glanced wonderingly at Elis, trying to discover if it was she who had given rise to these strange wistful thoughts. He decided that it must be her gentleness, her childlike need of protection as she lay there, like some warm little animal.

"Now you'll have to have your shoes taken off, or Berger will be angry," he said, and began to undo her dusty shoes, while Elis tried instinctively to cover them with her dress. "Good gracious me! So poor, and cold—and so tiny—" He took the little feet in their thin stockings in his hands as though they were little frozen birds, and placed his lips to them and tried to warm them with his breath.

"Luncheon is served," announced Berger. "On the veranda." He picked up the dusty shoes and disappeared, content.

With a smile Rassiem picked her up in his arms, lifted her high above his head, and carried her onto the veranda. She lay quite still, and he let her slowly slide down him and sink into a deep chair. Her light weight was so sweet and appealing that he kissed her very tenderly on her small, soft mouth. It was cool and innocent as a child's. But her eyes closed when he kissed her.

Berger had indulged in a profusion of silver and cut-glass, so that there were gleaming shafts of light all over the table. Close to the veranda grew a shady chestnut. It was in full bloom, and humming with bees; it sounded

like distant bells. There was a scent of spring and freshness. Elis felt as though she were in a dream. Nothing seemed impossible now that Hannes Rassiem had talked like this to her and kissed her.

"What are you thinking of, child, with those great big eyes?"

"I am so happy," said Elis softly, putting down her knife and fork, and adding in surprise, "I don't believe I have ever been so happy—it is quite new to me—"

Afterward she was put into a hammock slung between two birch trees in the garden. Up above was the delicate, rustling foliage and over it a domed sky made of milky-blue glass like an old-fashioned sugar bowl.

"Do you know what I've often wished, Elis? That I could see your hair loose," said Rassiem, playing with her heavy plaits, which hung down until they touched the grass. "May I?" He loosened her hair, took it in both his hands, let it flow softly over him, buried his face in it. It smelled young and pungent. And once again his home with its birch woods and wide meadows came to him. "You must come and see me often," he said. "You can't imagine how much good you do me. And you must tell me about yourself, my dear; tell me how a little girl like you lives and where you get that something from when you sing—it is so strange sometimes—"

"I don't want to talk about myself now," said Elis lazily. "I want to be perfectly quiet. Perfectly. And just listen to myself inside—there is so much going on." The hammock rocked gently to and fro, and each time it brushed against his shoulder, gaining fresh impetus, it was like a caress. The sun cast golden-green ripples on the birch trunks.

Elis was thinking.

At last, she thought. *At last this new, wonderful thing: Love. So sweet that it makes one want to cry, and so disturbing, so confusing to all one's thoughts. I could die for*

him, do anything, everything for him. He is fond of me. Everything will be all right now. Dare I kiss his hand? Or the tuft of fair hair over his forehead? Not his mouth, no, not his mouth. But in a little while—his mouth too—but only very gently—

Poor Dima. She doesn't know what it is like: to love. So gentle, so quiet, so comforting. Poor thing, she says it is brutal and is afraid of it.

Yes, because it is so strong. Strong—

Everything is so marvelous, simply marvelous. Red roses, dark red roses in my hair—

A poem? How funny that one should suddenly remember poems. Suddenly one understands everything— Now the sun is shining in my eyes—warm—like kisses—dearest—on my eyes too. And now everything is red. It is summer and I am walking through poppy fields—red—red poppies —waving to and fro—to and fro—and then everything is turning—and then to sink—happy—Mamma—unbelievably happy—

Elis was asleep. Two tiny glistening tears lay pathetically beneath her lashes. Hannes Rassiem lit a cigarette and gazed at the sky.

Chapter Eleven: "MY LOVE! MY LOVE! MY LOVE!"

AT WHITSUN THE COUNTRYSIDE lay under a spell of hot weather and Rassiem, dressed in flannels, was sitting in a red-lacquered basket-chair in the garden of his villa. The sun had tossed a handful of little yellow circles on the lawn at his feet. The blossoms fell silently from the chestnut tree, a finch was singing. It was Sunday and the world was a pleasant, quiet place.

Then the postman arrived, and handed a letter over the white garden railings.

Dear One, the Kouczowska wrote. *A little while ago I*

was present at Tannhäuser *and I thought you were marvelous. I wanted to look you up and tell you so myself, but various things prevented me. You may imagine that I didn't come all the way from Boston to Vienna just to hear you sing. No—the reason was partly tragic, partly ridiculous: there's something the matter with my voice. Overstrained, I believe. I had to cut my engagement short. I couldn't go on, Hannes, I simply couldn't go on. I went to see doctors, went to a sanatorium—the wretched people were so vague—and then I went to Vienna because I was homesick for dear old Professor Bayer, for the spectacles that hide his eyes, and for the calm sympathetic voice in which he says, "There's nothing the matter, my child; rest a little, take care of yourself for a couple of days, and your cold will be gone; it's just an ordinary cold!" That, or something like it, was what I wanted to hear, and so I went to Vienna—yes, Hannes—and I was homesick for something else too—to feel your hands that can be so comforting and cool and restful; that is, when you behave yourself, when you don't drink, or get up to some other nonsense.*

Well, I came home, and went to hear Tannhäuser *and was so delighted with you. (But, dearest—May as Elizabeth is really rather hopeless!) I wanted to come and see you after the performance, for I was very lonely, but I had such a burning in my throat from the wretched dust and wind of Vienna, and I felt tired and disagreeable. Next morning I went to see Bayer, and he examined and examined and made me swallow mirrors until I felt like a variety artist. And then he said various things. There seems to be something wrong with the vocal cords, Hannes. This time I would have liked to have seen his eyes behind his glasses, for one thing is certain: it is no ordinary cold. He prescribed rest, rest, rest. "If all goes well, we shall be able to sing Isolde again in the autumn!" he said. And now I sit*

and think over and over again: If all goes well—Hannes! But if it doesn't, dearest? What then?

And that is that. I wanted to make my apologies for leaving Vienna without looking you up. That day I couldn't bear to see anybody whose voice was normal.

I really intended to go to Florence but I got out at Verona and sat for a time on the hot white marble in the old little Roman Theater (do you remember—?) looking up at the fort and down at the river, thinking, wondering how on earth one could exist for months on end without singing. Then it occurred to me that I had already been able to bear it, in our earliest days on the Punta San Vigilio. Heavens, Hannes, at that time I never gave the theater a thought. I thought only of you. I often think of that now, and it seems so strange.

And so, here I am again, living in this lonely house, that stands completely by itself among its cypresses and olive trees, and knobbly fig trees; and at night I hear Lake Garda beating against the walls, and I see the big sailing boats gliding past in the early dawn, when I'm not able to sleep. And that is so often.

By day I lie in a long chair on the loggia and try to think of nothing, just looking out over the lake. On clear days I can see a glimmer over yonder of Salo and Gardone. Old Carlo is still a waiter here, and is still as punctilious as a master of ceremonies. He often speaks of you. "Che bel signore, ah, che bel signore!"

In the afternoons he brings me fruit, the last oranges and the first cherries, and puts them down on the balustrade. Then the little lizards creep out and catch flies, and the water rubs and scrubs itself against the "Stella" like an animal. In the evening it is green like poison, sometimes it is copper-colored and immense—without bounds. Then it is night again, and I stand for a long time on the loggia, naked, stretching myself in the silken air. Do you remem-

ber that you called it that? It pleased me: silken air.

Sometimes it seems to me then that you must come out of the dark room and join me, and take me in your arms, lift me up, carry me—as you used to do in those bygone days.

For everything here is just as it used to be, and I sit for hours at a time without thought, forgetting what lies between, my sins and yours, until I awake startled and remember everything, everything, including Bayer's last words: "If all goes well—"

If, Hannes—if—

Two days later:

I have read this letter through again and find that it is disgracefully sentimental. You see what happens when one lives alone for a month shut off from the theater. One neglects one's spiritual make-up, forgets to clothe one's heart, goes about unmasked, as though life were not a masquerade.

Fortunately, my dear, you are no great psychologist and won't worry yourself unduly; so you shall have this letter. I just wanted to add: it seems to me that my voice is getting better; the rest seems to be doing it good. You mustn't let yourself believe goodness knows what, or pity me, because of one or two rather sentimental phrases. I should be very annoyed with you. And under no circumstances, do you hear, under no circumstances are you to come after me here; I won't have it. Although I am thinking more of you here than I have done for a long time.

"Well," said Rassiem out loud, when he had finished reading, "so that's that; so that's how things are." He meditated, looked at the letter again, and then with a trance-like look in his eyes, he carefully folded the letter up very small. The pupils of his pale eyes grew large and dark. "Berger, the car! At once."

Berger appeared precipitately on his crooked legs,

rolled down the veranda steps, shaking his head at the sight of Rassiem's changed expression and disappeared at a run into the garden. The gate of the garage was opened noisily. Rassiem filled his hands at the fountain and dashed the cold water over his face in which the muscles were working. Berger held out his motoring-coat. And already he was in the car with the steering-wheel beneath his hand, and the car throbbing like an impatient animal. Away!

Garden railings rushed to meet him, and the little villas deeply embedded in greenery, and then the acacia trees and the telegraph posts of the main road. Alert and collected, he gazed straight ahead, thinking of nothing but the road which the car was swallowing so greedily.

When the car came to rest in the green alley before Professor Bayer's villa, Rassiem's hands were shaking. He took a deep breath and rang the bell. The garden gate opened softly and a small terrier trotted across the asphalt and stood still, surprised and sniffing. It was very quiet. Rassiem wiped the dust from his face.

"Rassiem! My dear fellow!" cried Bayer, who was sitting beneath a fir tree, with a bowl of yellow honey and masses of nodding flowers before him, and a pile of dark brown books. "Rassiem, what on earth do you want of me on Whitsunday? A certificate that you are hoarse? Completely unfit to sing? I can do that for you any day and every day if you wish!".

"My wife—" Rassiem said breathlessly. "My wife—"

"Ah! Your wife? Has she been frightening you, that wife of yours? Has she written and told you that there is something wrong with her?"

"I don't know what to do—she doesn't know what's wrong herself—that's why I've come. I must know—I must know—"

Professor Bayer raised his head until the sun glittered on

his spectacles. "Oh! I see. So you must know. What good would it do you to hear a beautiful Latin name? Besides, it's a professional secret. You appreciate that, I suppose?"

"Can she still sing? Tell me just that one thing: is she still able to sing?"

"Hm—well," said Bayer slowly, "for the moment—for the moment—you understand—she is not able to sing, that's obvious. As long as that woman has a note in her throat she's not likely to go and bury herself at a godforsaken little place like that on Lake Garda. With no theater, no elegant clothes, no admirers. No—for the moment—she is obviously not able to sing."

"Bayer," Rassiem said urgently, "I beg you, I implore you to be frank with me; will she ever be able to sing again? Or is it—all over? Tell me, I must know."

"And why, might I ask?"

Rassiem was silent and smiled, a slow smile that began in his eyes and seemed to make him very young and very transparent and wiped away many unpleasant things from his expression, as completely as though they had never existed.

Professor Bayer watched this smile and then he took off his glasses to clean them and revealed two kindly, deep blue eyes.

"Well, if she can't sing any more, if she has finished with the theater, then—well, everything may still turn out all right," said Rassiem to these eyes.

"Rassiem—are you waiting for her? Still waiting? Still?"

"I've never ceased to wait," he said, and covered his face with his hands.

They were silent and the bees hummed over the grass.

"Well, we must just wait until the autumn and see if things improve. It is possible. The vocal cords are paralyzed, you understand. We must let them rest for a little while longer and then we'll try electrical treatment. If

that's no use— Rassiem, do you think that you yourself are strong enough to help this woman over such a crisis?"

"Yes—I think so," said Rassiem. He pulled out the letter and read it through thoughtfully, and put it away again with a sigh. "I can't show you what she's written. You know her well enough. She always plays hide and seek. She says I'm not much of a psychologist. But what she actually does say I can very likely understand better than she does herself. I am never mistaken as to whether a woman belongs to me or not—my Maria—my own Maria—"

"I hope so, Rassiem. I'm afraid for the Kouczowska, if anything does happen to her voice. We must just wait."

"Well, so I will, just wait," said Rassiem. He stretched out his legs, put his gloves on the table, and leaned his head back to gaze into the sky, as though he must start waiting immediately. Bayer, amused, said nothing. A peal of bells came from somewhere in the stillness. Suddenly Rassiem visualized the simple house on the Punta with its walls rising straight out of the lake and crowned with tall cypresses. He could feel the passion of those first nights so strongly that his hands gripped the table. Maria stood before him, naked, slender, silvery, with the sky stretched behind her like violet velvet. Maria, young and loving—loving. She raised her arm . . .

Rassiem jumped up with a pale, twitching face.

"Good-by," he said. "I must be off—"

"Where to? Why this hurry?"

"On, on, away," he said, possessed by a fever of impatience. He paused at the garden gate. "And—Bayer, she doesn't tell me. Is she alone down there?"

"Alone, Rassiem. She's been traveling about alone for some time; and listen, my friend, surely you don't wish her any ill luck? Rassiem, you do occasionally think of the other person's point of view? Surely you're not such an

egoist as all that?" asked Bayer. But he was left standing in the cloud of dust raised by the departing car, with his question unanswered.

Rassiem raced off, seized by a fever that almost screamed. On, on, and think of nothing. Think of nothing but the next bend in the white road that wound its way along, uphill and down. Houses, trees, telegraph posts, milestones dashed by; villages, some leaning against hills covered with vineyards, and others spread out flat in the plains. In the distance a church with a glittering gold cross on its steeple lured him on. It drew nearer, became larger, and was gone. A wood unfolded itself. The air was hot and dry, and smelled of resin and petrol.

At dusk Rassiem sat on a terrace in Semmering gazing with hot, aching eyes toward the mountains from which came a cold, white wind. There was still a great deal of snow on the peaks, which stood flushed and peaceful in the last rays of the sun. In the valleys below it was already dark, and veils of mist hung over the woods.

Now Maria is looking out over the lake . . .

Rassiem drank black coffee, a great deal of black coffee with cognac. The people round about him regarded him like some strange animal. He looked at his hands, which were dusty and trembling. He felt goaded and feverish and thought, *My bad time is coming again—*

He returned to his car and drove home. The beam of his headlights lay broad and dazzling on the road before him, which seemed to be plunging toward him, with its bicycle tracks and its heaps of asphalt, looming up out of the darkness, appearing for a flash in the lights of the car and then vanishing. When he got out of the car at his villa his shoulders felt stiff. He looked at his watch in the light of the lamps and murmured, "Two hours and sixteen minutes! Good going!" But the speed had not lessened his fever. The house was in darkness, and he shouted so

loudly in the dark entrance hall that the old clock gave off a soft metallic reverberation. Berger rolled down the stairs, switched on the light, and plunged into the bathroom, bedroom, and dining-room, dispensing a positive flood of willing service.

Rassiem followed his actions with a grim expression, striding noisily about the house. Once he kicked the head of the bearskin which lay before the fireplace with such force that the stuffed head resounded hollowly. Then he plunged his hands in his hair and let them fall again.

He took the key from his writing-desk and strode up the wooden stairs which led from the hall to the bedrooms. The stairs creaked under him; upstairs it was silent and half-dark. He unlocked Maria's door and switched on the lamp by her bed.

Then he stood still, gazing . . .

The treetops outside had always sighed like that at night. And in the early morning the birds had twittered sleepily in the garden. The scent of the chestnuts and Maria's perfume . . . He was awake and bending over Maria, who was sleeping at his shoulder, in the crook of his arm—"Oh my love! my love! my love!—" The peace instilled by her deep breathing. Then the dawn of a new day would break.

Berger looked at the pale, sullen face with its reddened eyelids which Rassiem had brought home with him and silently placed bottles and glasses on the table. Rassiem fell heavily into a deep leather armchair and began to drink. The clock struck noisily, announcing every quarter, but no mist came to envelop old memories and thoughts. At midnight Rassiem snatched up a bottle and threw it at the wall. He laughed as the splinters fell to the ground, and the wine dripped and broadened into a red stain, red, dark red . . .

That jealous child Dima had smashed through the

windowpane in just the same way. Just like that. The blood on her naked brown arm and that hard, truculent mouth—how it yielded when one kissed it. It softened. It tasted like a strange, voluptuous fruit, that mouth . . .

Rassiem stood up and went to his writing-desk.

Dima, he wrote. *You must come to me now, I need you. Tomorrow I am going to Vienna and I shall expect you, Dima. I can't bear to be without you any longer. You must come. I shall wait for you.*

"Berger," he shouted. "This must go to the post at once!"

Berger pulled up his collar and tramped off on his crooked legs through a sudden cold downpour of rain. The nearest pillar-box was a long way away. Berger addressed a bitter monologue to the dark alleyways and dripping fences.

The letter was pushed into the pillar-box, postmarked next morning by a dutiful postal official, and forwarded to Vienna. In due course it arrived at the school and was handed over by the porter to Dima when she returned to her theory lesson for the first time after the Whitsun holidays. She saw the uncontrolled handwriting, and trembling, read the letter. Then she put on the white silk blouse and went to Hannes Rassiem.

Chapter Twelve: A FEVER, A HUNGER, A RICHNESS . . .

FRÄULEIN SOPHIE DIMATTER looked at the clock and sighed. She shook her head, and the long earrings in her delicate little ears jingled softly. The clock cleared its throat respectfully, and, after a brief, effective pause, announced that it was midnight. The windows were open; outside was a hot moonlit summer night and the scent of acacia blossom drifted heavily and sweetly into the low-ceilinged room.

The two girls were not yet home. Fräulein Sophie pursed her mouth angrily and resumed her occupation with careful, precise fingers. In front of her lay a large album beautifully bound in red plush, shining and decorated with gilt edges; beside it stood a small bottle of gum and a little pile of newspaper cuttings, the criticisms of Fräulein Dimatter as Aïda in the school performance.

Fräulein Sophie opened the book and smiled—on the first page in large and sweeping letters was written the word: *Critiques.* But on the second page were three cuttings, rather yellow, in rather blurred print, and underlined in rather faded red pencil; beside them were entered certain dates, dates that were—well, rather far back. These were Fräulein Sophie's criticisms, and in silent delight she read the three underlined sentences.

The Pansies dance, executed by eight graceful students, was particularly pleasing . . .

And: *The graceful swallow waltz was brilliantly danced by twelve ladies of the* corps de ballet, *in charming costumes . . .*

And finally: *Mention should also be made of a Tyrolese dancer, four dainty Japanese ladies, one Hungarian couple . . .*

The *dainty Japanese ladies* had been underlined twice. Fräulein Sophie beamed. It referred to the "Puppenfee" which was still in their repertoire: she was still dainty, she still danced the Japanese dance, and a weak round of applause still greeted the brilliant toe-dancing technique which it revealed.

Fräulein Sophie tore herself away with a sigh from these printed witnesses to her triumphs and turned, red pencil in hand, to Dima's reviews.

The interesting point about them was that they did not refer to *eight ladies* or *twelve ladies,* but that Fräulein Dimatter's name was mentioned in full and alone. The

red pencil moved searchingly down the page, finding sentences that were so marvelous that Fräulein Sophie leaned proudly back in her chair, heaved a heavy sigh, and repeated them under her breath. There was talk of the rising of a new star, of a talent, as yet immature, but full of great promise. One stern though excellent critic, however, spoke of the youthful unruliness of true, but unformed artistic talent. But another in plain, unvarnished words said: *A wonderful stage presence, an excellent voice and clever acting entitle Fräulein Dimatter to the highest hopes, and influential circles should not fail to keep their eye on this young lady.*

Having pasted in her cuttings, Fräulein Sophie read through once again this precious, individual criticism; at the phrase *wonderful presence* her thoughts began to rove again: *She's grown beautiful lately, that's true; blossomed out. She's gained a stone and her figure is altogether more mature. Her collarbones have disappeared, her bust is fuller—she'll look well in evening dress now. She gets her height from the Count, but her curves* (Fräulein Sophie thought of them as "curves") *she gets from me.* (And complacently she stretched out her smooth, white, rounded arm beneath the lamplight.) *Ah, well, one still had one's successes, and was still far from old despite one's forty years. In Paris the women remain young until they are past fifty and still have admirers. And even in Vienna—why, there was that Herr von Polnar, a fine gentleman from Hungary, aristocratic and dignified, who was seeking a connection with the ballet in keeping with his rank, and had lost his heart to Fräulein Sophie's curves. Well, one would wait and see . . .*

Fräulein Sophie returned to the criticisms: *That's it,* she thought, *"influential circles," that's it!* There was Rassiem, who was very interested in the girl—although, of course, only as a teacher, as he had explained not so long

ago in an endeavor to calm her troubled motherly heart while standing unexpectedly beside her in the wings during the *Troubadour*. Then there was the Count, who would be able to do a lot for her later on; but most important of all was the agent Blaulich, who had heard her at the school performance and had become attentive.

Herr Blaulich, a little king in the theater world, perpetually running after new talent, himself always chased by a thousand affairs, always in a hurry, breathless, always professionally enthusiastic over some rising star, always on the point of rushing off somewhere. This great man had expressed a desire to spend an evening in the company of Hannes Rassiem and Fräulein Dimatter. And that was why Fräulein Sophie was sitting at home alone that night, with one eye on the clock, which, after various wheezings, announced one o'clock. Fräulein Sophie sighed. For neither Herr Rassiem nor Herr Blaulich had the best of reputations. . . .

A little later there was a cautious rattling and creaking at the front door, and then from the hall came the scratching of a match, and Dima stood illumined by the light of the candle before the mirror. She was hot and rather pale; her hair was a little disordered, and her eyes very large and dark in her white face. She wore a soft yellow, almost elegant dress, which hung softly, if a little crumpled, about her, with pale gleaming silken reflections about her breast and shoulders. Her light evening cloak slipped to the ground and Dima wearily let it fall, standing with the candle in her hand, staring at her reflection. "Tired," she whispered, "so tired—"

"Dima!" called Fräulein Sophie from within, and Dima was startled.

"Yes, Sophie? Good evening, Sophie!" she said loudly and hastily.

"Come along into the room! What are you standing out

there like that for?"

Dima gathered up the cloak, searched the mirror once more, and smoothed her hand over her hair. Inside, Fräulein Sophie was making a noise over the lamp. "Please don't light the lamp, Sophie. I'm tired, I'm going straight to bed," protested Dima nervously.

"Fancy getting home so late! I was quite worried! And just look at you—overheated and disheveled like that!"

"I hurried—"

"And that's my nice cloak you're dragging about the floor! I shan't lend you anything again! And look, your dress is torn!"

"Where is it torn?" asked Dima, frightened. *What is the good of all this acting?* she thought, suddenly. *Tired, anyone can guess, they need only look at me—*

"Down there, the nice lace is all torn!"

"I must have put my foot in it on the dark stairs, Sophie. I'm sure I did it on the stairs—"

Suddenly Fräulein Sophie was overcome with tenderness at the sight of this great big girl standing before her gazing in fear and trembling at the torn hem of her skirt; she pulled her down to the edge of the bed. "Well, never mind the lace; we'll soon sew that up again. Tell me all about it—what happened? Where did you dine? How did Blaulich behave? What did he say? Is he going to do anything for you? Come along, tell me something!"

Dima tried laboriously to collect her thoughts. "We dined at the Grand Hotel, marvelously, and we had champagne. Blaulich is revolting—the way he looks at you! And his disgusting hands, all covered with hairs. He would have been familiar—if Rassiem—hadn't been there."

"He's no saint, either! It's very noble of me to let you go out with two such fellows. Well, well. It's all part of the game—it's necessary." She justified herself. "Has he at least got something in mind for you?"

"He offered me an engagement in Prague in the autumn—"

"What salary?"

"Four thousand to begin with, but Rassiem wouldn't let me go. I've got to study for another year, then I'll be able to do something and will get something better."

"I think you know enough. If it's good enough for Blaulich and the critics, it ought to be good enough for Master Rassiem. You know quite a lot—"

"Oh, no, Sophie! I don't know anything. Look at the way I'm tormenting myself over Isolde, and it won't and won't come right."

Dima's thoughts wandered to that first act that was so difficult and so obstinate, with its words that one did not understand, that had some strange secret meaning which they refused to divulge. And then its agonies, so tremendous, that with all the will in the world one couldn't encompass them, and all the darkness and desire for death, which Dima was unable to understand. "How can I tell whether Tristan loves Isolde from the beginning, or only after he has drunk?" she asked absently. And suddenly in the midst of it, Fräulein Sophie decided, "He's quite right about Prague! Prague is nothing! There are only Bohemians in Prague."

"Yes, it's full of Bohemians," said Dima, laughing, and she looked with relief at the round, small, childish face of her mother. *Mother,* she thought, in a sudden strange tenderness, *silly little Mother—*

"I'm going to bed now, I'm dog tired. Good night, Sophie."

"Sleep well. Good night, tell me all about it tomorrow." Dima stood waiting at the door. "What are you waiting for?"

"Sophie—are you angry that I—came home so late?"

"A little bit; but go to bed now," and the round face

disappeared in the pillows.

Hesitatingly Dima said, "Don't be angry, dear, please," and quite softly, so as not to offend her: "Mother—"

Fräulein Sophie did not hear it, but nevertheless she said, "Do you want a kiss? Come here!"

"No." Ashamed of herself, Dima hastily closed the door; the taste of many too passionate kisses was still on her lips.

But through the closing door Fräulein Sophie delivered a final admonition: "When Gusti arrives you can tell her from me that she is a hussy—a worthless hussy!"

Dima shrugged her shoulders and laughed silently. Her virginal bed against the wall with its bluish white linen looked small and cool; almost chilly in the hot, heavy acacia-scented night. Dima buried her hot cheeks in the pillows: "You nice thing," she whispered spontaneously. A shudder ran through her, and memories of the hot confusion of the past weeks oppressed her and made her blood tingle. She undressed, padding about on her bare feet, and stood, breathing deeply, at the window. Then, quite naked, she stood tall and slender before her mirror. In a caress of mingled pride and shame, she placed her hands about her breasts, in which the blue veins throbbed; with closed eyes she felt the touch of other hands, strong, eager, beloved hands. . . . Gusti fumbled at the front door, and a moment afterward was audible in her own room.

Dima slipped into bed and put out her candle. The square of the door appeared in the light of the lamp outside, and Gusti whispered cautiously, "Dima—are you back yet?"

"Yes."

"Long?"

"No—"

With a thrust of her chin, Gusti indicated Fräulein Sophie's room. "Is she asleep? Was she angry?"

"She told me to tell you that you were a worthless hussy."

Gusti laughed and brought her candle to Dima's bed. She was dressed in something pale and looked very pretty. Her eyes were liquid and shining, and her movements strangely relaxed. A faint breath of wine, perfume, and festivity clung to her thin clothes. "Look, your dress is torn," said Dima softly, a faint blush spreading over her pale face. "Gusti, Gusti, you've torn your frock."

"Oh dear!" said Gusti, frightened. "I caught it on something in the train. It was so overcrowded. It's easy to get caught up—"

Dima smiled into her eyes, a knowing, impudent, and tender smile. Whereupon Gusti flung herself down beside Dima and whispered, "We shall be married in a fortnight—and listen, Dima—didn't your frock get torn at all?"

"What on earth do you mean?" protested Dima weakly; her fingers were about her sister's soft warm neck.

"I saw you this evening, Dima—with him; you got into a car and drove up the Schwarzenberg Gardens—toward his house."

Well, the cat is out of the bag now, thought Dima with a sinking heart, and her throat turned dry. But Gusti pressed closer to her and whispered, "Now you know what it is like, too—are you happy?"

Dima was silent. *Happy?* she thought. *At first it only brings disappointment, a pain, a wonder: Is this all? Then comes a night when one lies bathed in tears, aware of oneself for the first time, awakened to knowledge; and after that comes a fever, a hunger, a richness that hurts—*

"Happy?" she asked. "Does one ever know that?"

"If Sophie knew," said Gusti, "wouldn't she have a fit? Her good little daughter, the virtuous one, the star, who has no need of such things—eh?"

"Oh, Gusti, don't talk about it like that. What do you know about it?"

"I understand, Dima. Love is love. There's no getting away from it. It doesn't matter whether it's an operatic tenor, or just a plain orchestral violinist. . . . At least Edlinger is respectable," murmured Gusti.

"Yes, he's that right enough, and I wish you joy of him! But leave me out of your respectability and all that nonsense. I'm sick of it," said Dima through clenched teeth, and though she spoke softly, she seemed to scream aloud. "Those tiny rooms, the grubby servant girl, and sausage with vinegar and onions every day; that's not life—that's not my world—I'm sick of it all! I must get out of it, get on—I must, I will. I mean to snatch life and taste it to the full, enjoy its richness and beauty, and get on—on—" She stretched her arms into the air and snatched something to her, something that she could not name.

Gusti shook her head in distress and embarrassment. "May you get your wish! I won't give you away; you must find happiness in your own sweet way. But believe me—no good will come of that, that won't have a happy ending. When love disappears you'll be left stranded, with nothing—"

Dima still held something pressed against her with eager hands: him and with him the whole of this rich, tempting, vital life. "This won't disappear, I won't let it—this love—"

"Oh, dear, oh, dear! You do make me laugh!" said Gusti, suiting her actions to her words. "Not disappear? You won't let it? And with Rassiem, whose affairs never last more than two months? You make me laugh."

Dima became sullen. "This is not an affair. People don't have affairs with me."

"What then? Perhaps you are engaged? Is he going to marry you, your Herr Rassiem?"

"Perhaps," said Dima in a clear, confident voice, "per-

haps he will marry me. If I wish it, expressly wish it, I'll make him."

Gusti opened her mouth but was silent, overwhelmed.

"Because—I've got him, I shall hold him fast. He's mine, he belongs to me as he has never belonged to anyone; he told me so himself."

"Never belonged to anyone; one has heard that sort of thing before!"

"This time it wasn't just a figure of speech," said Dima, for she could hear his voice again, so poignantly that it hurt her breast—his intoxicated, passionate voice, whispering, "I am yours, I belong to you as I have never belonged to any other woman—with one exception—one only—"

That was no figure of speech, and she thought of the strange moments when the shadow of that woman had thrust its way between them, fleetingly, intangibly like a cry blown on the wind. Suddenly a smile would be cut in two, an embrace broken off, a word interrupted, a gesture arrested by a passing memory which left him gloomy and out of temper. "I will hold him, hold him—" murmured Dima.

"May one ask how you are going to do all this? Have you got some special recipe?" Gusti enquired.

"Yes. I've learned it from him and I never forget it for one moment: don't love too well, don't give yourself completely. He who loves most, loses," she said, and her hands lying on the eiderdown were clenched.

Gusti reflected on the possibility of putting this precept into practice. "That's easier said than done," she said resignedly. "Don't love too well! How can you stop yourself?"

Dima reached out over the table by her bed on which the Tristan excerpt was lying ready. "There," she said; "that helps. If everything else grows too much for you—

work. And you'll be all right." Her hands pushed everything far away from her: love, longing, intoxication, all the mad, sweet, confused, painful things that constitute life.

"There, Gusti, I've got to learn my first act, and it won't and won't come right."

"Well, start on the second, then!" suggested Gusti absently, for Dima had stirred up within her all manner of strange thoughts. This girl with her hard head was capable of getting the better of this man, and then she would get him together with his enormous salary and his car and his villa. And as for oneself, one would be just plain Frau Edlinger, a nobody, a chorus lady, the daughter of Herr Kruschina, the property master.

"Well, good night," she said a little half-heartedly, and with a sigh of resignation. "If you think you can achieve it by force—well, I wish you luck!"

But Dima's eyes were vacant, her thoughts were wandering far, far . . . The candle went out. It became very still. The scent of acacia hung heavy in the clear night. And now this passionate longing took possession of her again, unappeasable, rekindled with every embrace . . . Hark! the beginning of the second act. For a long time—an immeasurably long time—Isolde listens to the hunting-horns that she does not wish to hear; it cannot be the horns, it must be the rustling of the foliage, the spring, for this fierce longing is unbearable, the presence of her serving-maid, the fear, the hesitation, the warning of the faithful few—all, all are unbearable. Every second of this hyacinth-blue night is irreplaceable. Oh, the torch which still burns, burns, burns, while her lover grows, waxes, and overwhelms her like a flood. *"Komm Du, und heissest du: Sterben. Komm, Nacht. Die Leuchte, und wär's meines Lebens Licht, lachend sie zu löschen zag'ich nicht."* And here Isolde throws her head back—far back.

Gusti heard a movement in Dima's room, the padding of naked feet. "Dima, what are you doing?"

A feverish voice replied, "I'm just setting the alarm for seven o'clock. I've got to work hard at Isolde tomorrow."

Chapter Thirteen: GOOD-BY AND GOOD-BY

AT FOUR O'CLOCK ON JULY THIRD the last class came to an end. The breaking-up concert was to begin at five. One sat, dressed in white, against the walls, feeling vaguely sentimental, and overpowered by the heat. The green curtains hung heavy and motionless at the open windows, which let in the acrid smell of hot asphalt. Opposite, the cupolas and pillars of the Karlskirche soared into an exaggeratedly blue sky. Rassiem wandered about the room in white flannels, giving a kind of farewell lecture—warnings to those who were returning in the autumn, unbreakable rules for those who were going away to begin life in small provincial theaters.

"Don't be too good-natured, never believe your colleagues—they are all rascals. Fräulein Bach: practice staccato exercises every day. Lorm: don't get nervous, whatever you do, and send me all your criticisms!"

Herr Lorm made a deep bow. He was going far away to Reval. Nobody had the least idea where that was. In the concert today he was to sing the *Bajazzo* Prologue and he was wearing a dress suit that had obviously once belonged to a gentleman, which he had secured for seven gulden.

"Fräulein Wied: you must take care of your voice, portion it out; don't exhaust it in the first act. Do daily arpeggios on 'I.' Do breathing exercises. In fact, all of you: practice, practice, practice! Do your breathing exercises every morning, do daily elocution practice, daily scales. Just look at Fräulein Dimatter and the progress she has made during the past year because she has done as she was

told. This doesn't apply to you, Fräulein Kerckhoff. You must rest for a little while, or your catarrh will never get better. You've been singing too much again lately—we shall have to take care of that delicate little voice, shan't we?" He lifted Elis's bowed head. The corners of her mouth were quivering a little but her wide-open, appealing eyes were smiling. Gelfius, who was sitting at the piano, his hair disheveled, struck a few chords.

"Herr Breitenstein: You're off to Olmutz; beware of the pretty girls there. You are a tenor, take care of yourself; don't drink, don't smoke too much, don't have too many affairs. One can only hope to keep one's voice if one leads a quiet life—"

At this point Gelfius began to laugh, so thoroughly and obviously amused that all had to join in. Rassiem took stock of his class, broke off, and said with dignity, "I must go to the office; good-by for the present. Mind you do your best later on!" And standing in the doorway he flung after him, "Fräulein Dimatter, I want to have a word with you after the concert."

"Yes, Herr Kammersänger."

Then the door closed behind him and the last lesson was over; all that was left, lingering in the air, was the smell of Eau-de-Cologne and cigarettes and a fresh-smelling English soap.

Gelfius struck two chords: *Tum, tum,* just in the way that a recitative terminates in an old opera immediately before the big scene and the aria begin. And those of them that were going to their first engagements felt strange: *tum, tum*—finished; and now something quite new was about to begin . . .

Gelfius shut the lid of the piano reflectively. "Well, children, say good-by to this sacred room where everything smells of Rassiem; but don't weep, I can't abide tears!"

Dima was the first to leave the room, tall and lovely in her yellowish dress that was almost elegant. The others jostled behind her. The last one, behind Gelfius, was Elis, who hesitated in the doorway and looked back, impressing once more on her mind, with a strange vividness, every single detail of the room. Farewell to old green curtains, and brown music stands along the walls, and dull glass lamp globes! Farewell to the black and white Principal's orders by the door, the wide, comfortable stove, and the ancient well-worn piano. There were cracks in the walls like faces at which one had always stared while singing. The corridor was dark, silent, strange. Frau Gibich was packing up her everlasting knitting.

"Do you know what I've noticed, Fräulein Kerckhoff?" said Gelfius. "That you always hesitate at every door, waiting for something—"

Elis raised her head quickly. "Have you noticed that, Gelfius? It's queer."

"One has no business to ask other people their thoughts, any more than one would ask them to strip off all their clothes—although that wouldn't be half so terrible. All the same, I would like to know what you were thinking about just now in the doorway."

"Oh, dear, Gelfius; what does one think about? It's so hard to say. I was thinking: the beautiful Karlskirche—those green curtains—the piano lid is cracked—in the winter the glow of the stove falls there, and the light is burning—and: Rassiem stands there when he is holding forth—and—I'm fond of those walls—"

He waited while she thought in silence, and eventually continued: "No, Gelfius, I was thinking: Farewell, dear rooms, who knows when I shall see you again—"

"But you are going to stay at the school for another year, Fräulein Elis!"

"Yes," she said uncertainly, "I'm stopping on, Gelfius,

but one can never be quite certain of anything, can one?" And as Gelfius was silent: "I should like to thank you for those lovely flowers, I was so pleased with them."

Gelfius in his embarrassment said, "What flowers? I don't know anything about them! And 'Thank you' is far too much!" And his hair seemed to bristle as he turned the dark brown color which was his way of blushing.

This reference was to a bunch of those peculiarly faded and miserable carnations that had appeared after Mamma's death and which could only have come from Gelfius. Elis was often finding these miserable flowers, tied together with string, wrapped up in damp newspaper, and so pathetically touching. They were bought from an old one-armed woman who cowered at a street corner begging, and it was not an easy matter to get them into Elis's hands unnoticed and unrecognized. Embarrassed, Gelfius suggested, "Shall we change the subject? What are you doing this summer?"

"I don't know yet; but—I've often wanted to ask you—won't you come and see me one day? I'm very lonely. Mamma is dead, Papa works, nobody comes to visit us. Dima has become very strange and unapproachable. And I'm not allowed to sing. And Rassiem—he's full of moods—"

"What's wrong with Rassiem?"

"Sometimes he seems contented and friendly, and then I imagine he's fond of me. I could sing all day for joy on those days. Then he's so strange and distant, and it hurts me—I'm very attached to him."

"I know," said Gelfius quietly.

"Then I sit about in the old house staring at the walls. I have nobody. I'm so alone—"

Gelfius's face took on an even darker hue. "Well, if you really need somebody—may I be allowed—I'd like to come very much," he said clumsily; "but I'm not a very respect-

able person. I don't really fit in with your fine house. Fräulein Kerckhoff, there is something I must tell you: for many years I was a pianist in a cabaret, in a very low place, do you understand? No, I'm not at all a respectable person; I haven't had a very easy life."

"I would like to have a friend," Elis said gently, and took his hand in hers. "You'll come, won't you; promise?"

Gelfius nodded and quickly pulled his hand away and thrust it into his pocket, in which were already a volume of Nietzsche and Sophocles' *Antigone. One does one's best,* he thought, confused; *one studies and tries to improve oneself—*

Frau Gibich was fastening an unfamiliar party hat on top of her false plait, and the girls that were to sing in the choir were pushing and pulling at their curls, their belts, and their white dresses. Dima was leaning silently against the window, humming to herself, the big aria from *Oberon* which she was to sing later. Suddenly her eye lit on a heart scratched in the wall, decorated with an elaborate *H.R. My heart,* she thought, touched and amused. *Six months ago it was my heart, and now—*

"Are you really stopping another year at the school?" the little Bach asked her for the third time. "How absurd!"

Yes, they all said the same, even Frau Gibich. If anybody ought to be able to get an engagement surely it should be Dimatter, the star performer of the school! "You're the best singer in the whole show!" asserted Herr Lorm, at the risk of upsetting all the others.

"Leave her alone, she has her own secret reasons!" pronounced the tenor Breitenstein, giving his tie a tweek.

"Rassiem thinks I ought to study a bit more. I don't know enough yet."

"Well, then, you'd better take care that he doesn't teach you too much!" crowed Breitenstein and disap-

peared. The Registrar appeared at the door, waved his empty portfolio, and called, "Ladies and Gentlemen of the choir, go to the small foyer; soloists to the artists' room, if you please!" The corridor emptied, and finally Herr Pietsch, the factotum, came and roped off the long row of silent rooms.

"Are you singing in the choir, Elis?" asked Dima on the stairs.

"No, I've been dropped; I've had no voice for a fortnight—been singing too much again. I can't stand much, you know, and sometimes I get so carried away—"

"Poor lamb," said Dima, putting her arm round Elis's shoulders; it sounded almost like a question. Elis was pleased and warmed by this approach from her friend who had altered so strangely.

"You've grown so lovely, you big lump, and quite grown up too! I say, do you remember how we howled like children a year ago at the breaking-up concert, because we weren't going to see him, Rassiem, for the whole summer?"

"Yes. And I hadn't got a handkerchief; that kept my woe within such ladylike bounds!"

"What are you doing this summer?"

"This summer?" Dima stretched out her arms. "First of all enjoy myself! And secondly learn Isolde! But I may do it the other way round in the end."

Elis laughed. "But, Dima, if perhaps you aren't studying, or if you've learned it all and can spare a moment of your enjoyment, perhaps you'll come and see me? Will you? There is just a chance, isn't there?"

The two girls looked into one another's eyes. Elis's eyes became dark and serious, and Dima lowered hers. In the door of the artists' room she stooped quickly and kissed Elis. But Elis stood still for a long while, her brows puckered, vaguely frightened by the strange ardor of those changed lips.

Chapter Fourteen: AN EVENING'S ENTERTAINMENT

THE HALL WAS ALREADY FULL of nodding, gesticulating people when Elis entered the balcony; the colors of the women's summer frocks turned the stalls into a flower bed from which a stirring, humming warmth arose. The caryatids bearing the burden of the boxes on their arms gazed fixedly at their golden breasts; beams of sunlight glinted on the pipes of the organ. In the front rows reserved for the directorate and teaching staff there was an awe-inspiring display of bald pates and full-flowing beards topping ceremonious black coats. Scattered among them were the little, old women teachers, who gave instruction in secondary subjects. The Director, wearing a collar that was too high for him, was perspiring freely. Rassiem was leaning over him, looking like a fair-haired street urchin among all those venerable figures.

The white-robed women's choir appeared, led by the Registrar, and were arranged in a kind of wreath around the stage; after them came Herr Pietsch, a reserve baton in his hand, escorting the orchestra, who immediately, in spite of strict instructions to the contrary, set up a thin Oboe-A, followed by a thick cloud of plucked, blown, or scraped fifths. The piano revealed a mouth full of yellow teeth in its open gorge.

Suddenly, without any warning whatever, the organ began a slow, deep droning. Programs were rustled eagerly as the buzzing in the hall died away, and before one realized it had begun, one was in the middle of Bach's *Passacaglia.* Somewhere hidden away a small creature released the requisite waves of sound in so dull and academic a manner as to make them seem utterly unintelligible. The audience became restive and started to whisper again. Blaulich's grotesque head could be seen in the principal

box, and a rumor flew round that the Director of the Opera was present. Then, just as unexpectedly as it had begun, the organ stopped; just when one had begun to think that these sounds would go on forever. There was an embarrassed silence in the hall, while an equally embarrassed bespectacled young man bowed repeatedly and vanished, unnoticed. But now the critics began to arrive in a belated stream, and took up their corner seats with scornful expressions on their faces. One of them said aloud, "I am now about to hear the Mendelssohn Concerto for the eighty-fourth time this season." And sure enough, while the Director was ceremoniously mounting the conductor's rostrum assisted by the excited gesticulations of Herr Reindl and Herr Pietsch, Herr Silberling appeared, tuned his violin with his confident gray hands, plastered his curl a little more firmly, and then set briskly to work on the Mendelssohn Concerto. The teaching staff nodded with pleasure, for he knew his job well; the Director worked hard; the orchestra accompanied noisily but correctly. There was loud applause.

Then Herr Lorm appeared, creating a sensation by wearing white gloves like a full-fledged professional. The music in his hands shook, and he trembled so dreadfully that Rassiem tugged his hair in desperation. But the critics noted that he had a voice and good breathing technique and the excited students of the College in their large hats applauded enthusiastically. He was too sweet, with his dark eyes and white gloves.

And then Fräulein Dimatter appeared, and silence fell on the hall. Tall, blooming, and beautiful, she walked across the stage. Her dark curls trembled about her brown face and her hard mouth was blood-red like a wound. While the orchestra were beginning the aria from *Oberon* she furtively sought out Rassiem, fixed her gaze on him, and began to sing. There was such a richness in her voice,

such glamour, such passionate strength in its expression, that the venerable bald heads and full beards became quite excited. The critics woke up and began to listen. Herr Blaulich, sitting in the principal box, looked pleased, and pursed his mouth as though he were tasting wine.

But down below sat Rassiem, leaning forward, oblivious of everything about him, gazing at his beloved in complete absorption. There were bursts of applause as she finished, and she smiled a new, confident little smile, and her walk had something of the restrained power of a handsome animal. Delighted, the audience applauded her again and again.

The items that followed were of no importance whatever. Trumpeter Kohl blew a Fantasy and was so dreadfully nervous that he came to grief on a high C. It was of no consequence; nobody was listening. As for the four corpses who appeared on the platform and sang, without taking their eyes from the Director, the Quartet from *Rigoletto*—they were completely ignored. After this, Herr Pietsch and Herr Reindl helped the Director down from the rostrum.

The white-clad choir now came to life, and conducted by the composer, one student Rebner, began the prize composition, "The Flood." At times it sounded like persistent rain, at times like the overture to the *Walküre;* the choir embarked on a great yammering, which seemed to last for the whole forty days of the original Flood. But even this came to an end. The dove flew around with the olive branch in a manner vaguely reminiscent of *Lohengrin,* and then the concert was over. It was very hot in the hall. The gold of the caryatids glistened dully as though through a veil. Now the ceremonial distribution of certificates and prizes was to follow. But when a lachrymose old gentleman rose to his feet to make a speech, several people left the hall in horror.

Elis waited for a while in the corridor leading to the boxes, hoping to meet Rassiem. The speaker in the hall held forth in a monotonous, depressing drone; a door slammed somewhere, an attendant hissed "Silence," and Rassiem dashed past.

"I'm going to excuse myself from the ceremonial apotheosis," he whispered to her, and was gone—away down the dark passages which led to the artists' rooms.

"Fräulein Dimatter—just a moment please!" he said in the doorway, after a glance at the room full of congratulating students. Outside he looked quickly round and pulled Dima after him into an empty room. It was twilight inside, lit only by the narrow stripes of sun which penetrated the closed Venetian blinds. It was very quiet.

Dima looked at him—smiling her new, rather proud, rather confident smile. "Well, my dear?" she asked softly.

He threw his arms about her, buried his teeth in her neck, "Darling," he whispered, suffocating. "Oh—my darling—I love you—so madly—madly—"

She felt his arms trembling, saw the passion in his eyes, and closed her own. The clock in the Karlskirche struck. Dima released herself. "People will be here in a moment, darling, we must be sensible."

His hands grasped her arms, his eyes flickered. "My dear, let's go! Come along with me, I'll stay in Vienna today. We must be together—darling—please—please." And, seeing a gentle smile of refusal in her eyes: "I am pining for you, I am possessed—all night, Dima. Oh, God! every night, Dima. You mustn't say no, stay with me today." He was stammering, his hot, feverish hands slid along her arms. "Don't make me plead like this, Dima!"

He belongs to me, Dima realized; *mine, all mine.* But she threw her head back. "You're not to plead. You know well enough that if I don't want to, that won't help you at all." And as she felt herself weakening and succumbing

to a new embrace, "Tell me, darling, how did I sing?"

"Come home with me, I'll tell you there; quickly, come before all the crowd arrive."

"I don't want to," said Dima. "I don't want to."

"Come, please, come. I'll do whatever you like; drive out to the Prater? Far out where it is quiet? Or come with me to Rodaun? Shall we work at Isolde? No, I won't do anything to you, I won't touch you, if you don't wish it, darling. Only don't leave me alone today. I'm so crazy for you, I've been longing for you—"

"You've been longing? That's wonderful. It's the best thing— No, Hannes, I'm going home like a good girl now, and you're going home too."

Rassiem flew into a rage. "You are tormenting me, you're cold and calculating! That's a rotten way to behave! You let me plead and hunger for you. Because you know I need you, you do just as you please. You'd better take care that you don't make a mistake. There are others —one of these days I shall have had enough, and then it'll be the end."

The door slammed behind him. Dima started to follow him, stopped, clenched her hands, bit her lips until their deep red turned pale. "No—no," she whispered. It sounded like a sob. Another door outside slammed shut. Well, he was gone now, but tomorrow he would return, more passionate than ever, more her slave than ever. Her limbs relaxed, her eyes burned dryly, and her heart hurt a little after all this excitement.

Go home and lie down, she thought; *don't think of him, read a book.* Elis had recently pushed one into her hands— Wagner's exposition of *Tristan and Isolde.* One might learn something from that. Her thoughts turned with relief from Rassiem, to roam in that hyacinth-blue night of Tristan which had to be created and which presented such difficulties. On the stairs, which were full of seething hu-

manity, something warm and unpleasant touched her neck, someone breathed close to her. She discovered Herr Blaulich's hot face close to her own.

"You sang like a good girl, my child, very nicely, very nicely indeed! I've had a word with the Director of the Opera, he praised you very highly! You have my respects —you'll get on! But first you'll have to do some provincial tours to gain experience. Well, what about Prague? Second-rate place, but good prospects. What do you say, shall we talk it over?"

"It all depends on Rassiem, Herr Blaulich. He wants me to study another year."

"Does he? Under him? He's a sly devil! As long as he is having an affair with you, he'll hang on to you, but afterward he'll throw you over and you'll have to get on as best you can."

Dima's brown face grew pale, and there was a bitter taste in her mouth. "What—makes—you—think—?"

"He'd be a fool if he didn't have an affair with you. And you? Are you very fond of him, eh? Yes, yes, I know—he's a fine fellow and knows his way about. But let me tell you, we're worth considering too; we have our points. And we are influential and can do something for you. Well, think it over about Prague, and if you want anything, come and see me, you understand? I'm here once every month, at the Grand Hotel." He pinched her neck, blinked with lewd pleasure, and disappeared. Dima shook herself, tried to rid herself of the feel of that warm, sticky touch, and walked out of the house. In front of her walked Elis, a black, lonely figure among all the gaily clad girls. Her head was bowed. She was just turning the corner. *Why not follow her and talk to her a little; she is so quiet and fresh and childlike still,* thought Dima. But when she reached the corner, and looked searchingly down the street, she saw Rassiem hurrying after Elis. She was startled, flushed,

clenched her hands and forced herself to smile. *He's sulking like a small boy, you must not give in,* she thought. She turned round briskly and went home.

The sun was already sinking behind the houses. Elis was walking slowly, fully occupied in preventing herself from crying, from crying in public in the street. For now the long vacation had started, without even a farewell, without the prospect of a meeting, nothing. Two whole months lay before her, as colorless as sackcloth, and she was already longing for him. Longing for his hands—yes, principally for his hands. And it was scarcely a month since he had kissed her; yet now he was as distant as though nothing had happened. *I imagined you were fond of me,* she said in her heart, softly and sadly. And suddenly she heard herself called softly, called by Hannes Rassiem. Then the tears welled up in her eyes and would not be restrained.

"You wicked girl, running away like that without saying good-by! Without telling me where you will be during the summer, dear."

"Dear." He said "dear." He remembered—

"Yes, you may well be ashamed and hide your eyes. Fancy treating an elderly gentleman, and your teacher too, so badly!" He leaned toward her. "Look at me, Elis. I am afraid of what I may see in your eyes—say something, child."

Elis was utterly incapable of saying a word, the lump in her throat was too big; but she looked at him and smiled.

"You sweet thing. Other people always bring trouble and strife, but you soothe me. I would like to have you near me always when my bad times come upon me."

Yes—my dear, cried a choking voice within Elis. *I would lay my hands on your heart and you would be calm—*

"Today—you must stay with me today, Elis, or I shall get up to some mischief or other. Will you help me?"

"Yes."

"Yes, just yes. There you are, you see; all's well now. You're not like others. I was afraid of this evening. Now it will be lovely. We'll do something lovely. But what?"

"I don't know. We could go on walking like this; that's lovely isn't it?"

"Yes, and in an hour we should reach Favoriten, which is hideous: workmen's houses and bars. No, we'd better drive somewhere, shall we?"

"Yes."

"We'll go for a jaunt and have our food in the open air and just be happy. It's a lovely evening."

He took her arm. It seemed to her that the whole sky was made of gold, and the air shimmered joyfully. Berger was waiting in the car, and after one look at Rassiem's face, took the wheel. They drove slowly.

The air was cool, people strolling in the twilight looked like gay splashes of color. The streets sang. Rassiem leaned back silent in his corner, and when he took out a cigarette Elis noticed that his hands were trembling. Shyly she laid her hand on the cushioned seat, and edged it cautiously toward him, until it was lying on top of his that was twitching with its swollen veins. He was startled out of the strange depression into which his thoughts had plunged him. "Well, little one? What does this dear tiny hand want?"

"Just this," said Elis, "this—" Smoothly she stroked his fingers, rhythmically with her breathing.

"How clever you are; that is so soothing." He flung the cigarette away and gave her both his hands, which slowly became calm and lay quite quiet on her knees.

"I always had to soothe Mother like this while she was ill."

A silence fell upon them, the streets became quieter, the houses smaller, with here and there a red roof over-

hung by old trees. Rassiem bowed his head and after a long time raised it again. "And I my wife—" he said almost inaudibly.

He could see the Punta before him, and the woman who wandered there waiting for her lost voice to return. She who had stood naked in the silken night air, who made him suffer and was herself suffering. He pulled himself together. "Where are we?"

"In Döbling. Do look at the dear little houses. There is a tiny Maria Theresa castle; it is rather like our house, but it has a lovelier garden. It's lying down on its elbows between the meadows, isn't it? And they smell of summer and health. Oh! nothing smells so good as fresh earth."

"You're right, Elis. And do you know what we'll do? We'll drive far out and lie in the grass, and bury our faces in it. God! what ages it is since I did that!"

"Is it? Don't you ever do it in your garden? I can lie like that for ages and sing. Dear earth, dear earth—"

"Are you fond of the earth?"

"There is a Chinese poem in which somebody is saying farewell to life; he says 'Happiness has not smiled on me in this world.' But he says, too, 'Dear earth—' "

"Rubbish, girl! You're being sentimental again and exaggerated! A Chinese poem! What on earth should you know of such refinements? No, you're just a precocious, overgrown child!"

"Yes, I was always precocious and sentimental," said Elis seriously. "My mother told me where I got it from. I can't help it; it comes of having too many artists in our family. My great-grandfather was an organist and grandfather was the famous Kerckhoff, whose landscapes hang in the Museum. And Father sculpts and is clever in his way, too, but I am only precocious and sensitive. I always long for color, color; I'm starving for color. And then music. It makes me cry when Schubert changes into the

minor key. When I heard *Tristan* for the first time it made me ill, really ill, feverish, and the doctor came, and I lay half dead in bed for three days—but it was lovely. But I'm afraid of reality—"

"Don't be silly, child," said Rassiem, embarrassed; and because he did not understand a word of it all, he put his arm about her shoulders comfortingly and tenderly.

They drove through Heiligenstadt, past white villas and gardens in which luxurious wistaria was blooming, past the old church, with its slender steeple stretching into the sky. Then came the little country lanes of Grinzing and Nussdorf. Every now and then there was a warm smell of stables; children were playing; the sound of a thin, village bell somewhere in the distance floated in the air, and the scrape of fiddles in the little wine gardens. The banks of the Danube appeared, the river flowing broadly and slowly along with a last iridescent gleam on its waves. Occasionally a ship cut a black silhouette out of the yellow shimmering sky. A cool fresh breeze came from the fading evening meadows on the opposite bank. The little village of Kahlenberg lay huddled darkly about its tiny, graceful church; the little houses squeezed up the hill, nestling in the vineyards and meadows; twinkling lights beckoned from behind curtained windows. The car stopped. In a few moments they were sitting in the garden of a small inn, feeling completely happy. The world seemed a pleasant place, and everything looked cheerful. The horse-chestnut trees showered them with their small prickly fruits; a brown hunting-dog trotted up and put his head in Elis's lap. A small boy brought them a net full of smooth, flapping, silvery fish, from which to choose their dinner. The sharp scent of the young vines growing at the back of the house hung in the air. Beneath the table Rassiem clasped Elis's hand in his own warm hands, which seemed quiet and at rest. All this was immensely important and

something new which must be added to one's experience.

Elis talked a great deal and laughed softly. Rassiem, pleasantly vacant, gazed at the delicate child-like face, gleaming pale above the black dress; she was sweet, and she did him so much good. One need only listen to the small voice, that flattered one a little, saying with a happy sigh that the world had never been so pleasant as it was now. One could think without pain of the pale, red-haired woman who would be sitting at this moment on her loggia, staring out over Lake Garda, trying perhaps secretly to sing with her sick voice; who would never, never write and say how she was . . .

One could hold this child's small hand beneath the table because it was soothing and because it was all part of an evening's entertainment. One was almost able to forget that brown, blooming creature who arrived like a whirlwind, upsetting everything and yet managing when she would, to keep the upper hand. One could give little Elis something to drink, and be amused by the way her eyes shone and the way she blossomed. Suddenly he was struck by a surprising thought, and he pulled Elis closer to him by her two hands. "Are you fond of me?" he asked close to her mouth.

She was silent, but her upper lip trembled nervously like that of a child that is going to burst into tears; there were tears, too, in her eyes. *Of course! it's the same old business over again,* he thought: *but at least she is sweet and charming about it.*

Meanwhile it had grown quite dark, and a small white moon had mounted into the sky. "Now we'll go and lie down with our elbows in the grass, and smell your nice, clean earth, shall we?"

Hand in hand they climbed the narrow lanes, which imperceptibly merged into the vineyards. From far in the distance there came the sound of a horn, and the woody

slopes threw back a timid echo. Somewhere in the darkness of the evening there were voices.

"There's always music in the air here; either it's a horn or a song borne on the wind. Listen!" whispered Elis. They stood still on the silvery moonlit meadow. A brook chattered in its sleep. White veils hung over the vineyards.

"Here?" asked Rassiem, throwing himself on the grass and pulling Elis gently down to him. "What now, Elis?"

"We'll listen to the evening and feel the breath of the good earth."

"Yes," he said, content, seeking her mouth, which was cool and soft like a tiny fallen blossom. And thus quietly they lay, mouth to mouth. The little church sent up a peal to them, the moon shone down, the silvery Danube flowed along, the horn in the woods was silent.

They breathed evenly, pressing close to the breathing earth, overwhelmed by the life in the meadows and hills and woods and animals.

"What are you thinking about, darling?"

"I'm gazing at the sky and thinking: forever, forever, forever and ever—"

"Look at me, Elis, and say something to me."

"Darling—" said Elis.

But later on when they were back in the car Hannes Rassiem thought himself rather a fool for taking no more from her than a kiss.

Chapter Fifteen: THE FORBIDDEN ROOM

FRAULEIN GUSTI DIMATTER was married in St. Paul's Church with a great display of myrtle and tears. It was a grand and ceremonious occasion; her colleagues in the chorus sang a resounding Ave Maria, and four trombones played a triumphal march in honor of the bridegroom. Fräulein Sophie wept. When it was over the young couple

settled down in a small flat which had been magnificently furnished with the help of the "Capital." Dima was presented with the white silk blouse as a parting gift.

Two days later Fräulein Sophie dried her tears and blushingly informed Dima that she had been invited to stay with a colleague, a young lady living in Hungary, in the country. In her pocket crackled a letter from Herr von Polnar, that stately nobleman from Budapest. And Fanny, the slovenly maid, announced in a flood of tears that she too must go away, as she had to hurry to her mother, who was seriously ill. After two days of wild upheaval of trunks, jars of preserves, and excited activity, Dima found herself alone in a strangely bare flat which smelled strongly of moth balls—consigned to the care of Frau Edlinger with a certain amount of money, and many impressive exhortations to chastity.

Dima wandered restlessly about among the dust-sheeted furniture, now glancing through a piano score, now playing a few chords, which echoed hollowly through the carpetless rooms. One endless night a longing for Hannes Rassiem took possession of her and overwhelmed her like a flood. Next morning, throwing all caution to the winds, she decided, regardless of the consequences, to take a holiday. She wired him, *Come.* That evening he collected her in his car and drove her out to Rodaun.

It was high summer. The days began early with the twittering of birds in the garden, and a shimmer of blue penetrated the curtains and slowly illumined the room. Opposite the bed hung a print of Correggio's *Jupiter and Io,* and Dima would dreamily watch the soft lines of the woman yielding to the shadow, slowly becoming clearer. Dima's head was nestled against Rassiem's shoulder; her breathing was as regular and as calm as his. A bowl of fruit on the table gradually disengaged itself from the twilight. Lazily she stretched out her arm and laid her hot

hand on the cool skin of the apricots. Outside the windows the treetops rustled gently, the little church clock struck four.

This was the hour at which they fell asleep.

Much later Hannes Rassiem was awakened by a tremor through Dima's body, but she was still asleep. He threw back the coverlet and gazed at her through half-closed eyes. There were faint shades of amber in the smooth skin at her knees, her breasts, and her shoulders. Her lips, slender and beautifully molded, were like those of some famous bronze; there were tiny blue veins in her arms.

Dima was very lovely.

He leaned forward; she awoke and pulled him toward her with closed eyes. The sun was already shining in the room, and Io gleamed in the light. There were undergarments scattered all over the floor, and mixed up with them a few faded sprays of strong-scented jasmine. Downstairs on the veranda there was a rattle of breakfast things. Dima stretched herself, luxuriating in her strength and health and the warm blood flowing through her veins, and laughingly greeted the morning. In play, Rassiem laid an apricot to his temples, which were aching vaguely.

They were days of intense heat. The hot air danced and flickered, giving to everything confused and dreamlike shapes. The trees pierced the sky like green flames, and a dancing haze hung over the meadows. Hands, when you clasped them, were hot, dry, and hungry to the touch. Everything seemed naked and elemental. The hours burned liked torches, lit one from the other. Hours in the morning when Dima stood after her bath before the mirror contrasting her brown body with Rassiem's pale limbs; when she lay like a bronze statue on the stone rim of the fountain, gazing happily without thought at the reflections in the water, which splashed lightly over her. Long hours in the hammock, in the meadows, stretched out on

the bearskin in the hall. Hours during which they rushed through the countryside pressed close to one another in the car; when they drank wine, laughed, in high spirits; hours in which they sat silent on the veranda, oppressed by the heavy twilight atmosphere. And hours at night beneath a violet starry sky, or beneath the orange yellow lamp of the bedroom; all burned like torches, with a suppressed fierceness that was liable to burst forth like an animal.

When Rassiem was tired he would produce the key of Maria's room and sit morbidly for hours among the dainty painted furniture that still retained a faint reminiscent scent. He would sit staring vacantly before him, secure from Dima, who was not allowed to enter this room. He would hear her singing down below; she was practicing Isolde—mastering the second act; for despite all this ecstasy of passion she still did not forget her work each day. Hannes Rassiem sat upstairs in his wife's room, smoking and staring in front of him, listening despite himself to the singing. Sometimes he hated Dima, for her love was of the kind that could burn like the lash of a whip. But she was in his blood; he was obsessed by a burning hunger for her. For hers was all the richness of youth, and Hannes was over forty . . .

Downstairs in the music-room Dima dropped her hands from the piano and sat silent with feverish eyes. She listened to the stillness of the house; it was difficult to fight against a shadow. He was still sitting motionless up there in that locked, forbidden room that was full of memories that had no right to live any longer. Angry and desperate, she bit her clenched fists, until the atmosphere around her seemed red and electric. Noisily she slammed the lid of the piano and stood up. Berger appeared on tiptoe, a finger to his lips.

"What's the matter?"

"Ssh—ssh—please. Whatever you do, don't make any noise, Madame. Music by all means. But no noise. We've been sitting upstairs for the past two hours. That means we are angry and dangerous. Something's brewing!"

In a loud, clear, courageous voice Dima announced, "I'll go and fetch Herr Kammersänger," and vanished. Berger raised beseeching, helpless, terrified hands, but already the stairs were creaking beneath her tread. Then came the sound of a peremptory knock on the door upstairs.

Rassiem was on his knees by his wife's bed, his head buried in the cool silk of the eiderdown. He felt tired, ill, exhausted, out of voice; he longed to weep, to drown himself in sentimentality, and seek relief in tears from the turbulent fever of his blood. He drank in the memories of this room like a soothing draught. Then came this knock; he remained motionless and laughed angrily, spitefully; Dima was not allowed in here.

There was a moment's silence; no footsteps could be heard; then came another knock.

"Go away! Go away! I want to be left in peace, peace, peace!" he shouted in exasperation. Dima flung open the door.

He jumped up, ice-cold with rage, and glared at her in fury. He took a few impetuous steps toward the door, waving his arms in the air. "Get out of here!" he almost screamed, his voice breaking ungovernably. "Are you out of your senses to take such a liberty? You're not allowed in here, do you understand, you are not allowed in here! I can't stand the sight of you any longer, you make me sick, clear out—go away—"

He shouted wildly and unreasonably. His teeth were bared and his upper lip curled like that of an angry animal. As Dima stared at him, the seductive smile froze on her lips and she started to tremble as though in a fit. Un-

consciously she took a few steps into the room. Then he sprang at her and lashed out blindly.

She uttered a harsh cry, flung her hands before her face, and ran stumbling away. Hannes Rassiem was just able to see her stumbling down the stairs as though through a mist, and then at last he was able to weep.

He wept for a long time, abandoning himself blindly to it like a child. He wept as much for the relief it afforded him as for any definite cause. He wept because of Dima, because of Maria, because of himself; because of his feverish life that was constantly calling for more powerful narcotics which in turn left him emptier than before. He wept because he was wild and angry, because of his drinking, because he desired Dima, because he had struck Dima. He wept because of the Kouczowska's obstinate silence. And finally he wept because at the last performance of *Götterdämmerung* he had bungled a high C. And in the end he fell asleep, lying stretched out across his wife's bed.

When he woke up there was blue darkness in the room, and a rustling and dripping outside the windows. A bright beam shining on the garden from the veranda made the wet bushes glisten in the rain. There was a sharp scent of wet hay and herbs. Hannes Rassiem felt relieved, lighthearted, and well. He would go down and ask Dima's pardon.

He felt his way down the dark stairs into the dark, silent hall. There was no sign of life in the house, only the metallic dripping of the raindrops on the roof of the veranda. A light was burning on the veranda where the table was laid, with gleaming wine bottles on it. Rassiem rang the bell and Berger appeared in carpet slippers, with a sympathetically sad expression on his face.

Where was the Fräulein? Gone. How gone? What did that mean: gone? Just gone. Completely gone.

Oh, just gone? Just as she was, in cardinal red muslin

and with bare feet, as though she were going to a fancy dress dance? No, the young lady had changed in a great hurry, packed up her things in newspaper, including the Herr Kammersänger's score of *Tristan* from which she had been studying, and just disappeared. Not toward the station, but down the street.

"All right," said Rassiem. "Never mind, you can serve dinner!"

He ate in silence and in the intervals between courses, whistled loudly to himself. Berger stared discreetly away from him. Rassiem drank greedily. "Did she cry?" he asked after quarter of an hour.

"No."

When Berger served the cheese, he added, "But she looked very strange and ill."

"I didn't ask for your opinion."

Berger disappeared with a bow and left Rassiem to the wine bottles and his thoughts. These were neither clear, nor sensible, nor pleasing, but they gave him a thirst for wine, for strong cigarettes, for noise and stimulating scents. Half the night through Berger heard him walking up and down, whistling sometimes, and sometimes too he heard the clinking of glasses and bottles. Later on a waltz was played in a furious tempo on the piano; then there came the sound of running water in the bathroom. Still later Rassiem sang the "Song of the Grail," and then the Bajazzo aria, which he elaborated with a strange sobbing laugh, that gave him a cold shiver. At three in the morning Rassiem groped his way through veils and mists to his bedroom.

The red of Dima's garment lying on the floor with golden chains coiled on it like snakes leaped to his eyes; a bitter scent arose from it. Hannes Rassiem bent down and found Dima's gloves lying near it. Cheap, little-girl's gloves, artificial silk, carefully darned at the seams; and

this moved him strangely. He undressed, turned out the yellow light, and threw himself on the bed that was pervaded by Dima's scent, which was faintly and yet sharply reminiscent of thyme. Suddenly he was beset by an uncontrollable longing to be gentle to her, to hold her tenderly in his arms, to hear her breathe, to feel her mouth in the dark like a luscious fruit.

Outside the birds began their day, the room grew slowly lighter. Io languished in the arms of her cloud. Rassiem, his face pale with longing, with small, tired wrinkles already appearing round his eyes and chin, fell asleep.

On the three succeeding days Dima received letters from Rassiem by every post. The first one she received with trembling hands, and read with eyes that burned from lying awake all night in dreamless desperation. But when the second letter arrived, and then more and more, she developed a hard, puzzling smile.

They were crazy, clumsy letters in which the words fell and tumbled over one another as though they were drunk. Pleas for pardon, self-recriminations, reproaches, cruel things, childish things, and mixed up with them all, a hundred times over: *I love you so,* and always the same refrain: *I cannot live without you.*

Dima did not answer. She wandered about among the shrouded furniture in the empty flat, biting her knuckles until they were raw, and finally she flung herself into the third act of *Tristan.* This helped a little. The death of the lovers slowly took form and sense. She gestured in front of a mirror, bent over an imaginary beloved corpse, stretched defensive hands in the air. Her face learned how to grow numb with tremendous pain—the eyes enormous and empty. Then came the transfiguration; death. She sat at the piano singing, working for hours at one passage of breathing, one sound that would not be mastered. She knelt with greedy eyes before the music, trying to probe its

secrets. She lay with closed eyes and could see Isolde moving, standing, letting her arms fall, lifting the beaker. Beneath all this lay as though under a thin covering the thought of Hannes Rassiem, a scarcely concealed torment, consuming her with longing.

On the third evening there was a wild ringing at the bell; the sound, weakened by age, cut shrilly across the peace of the past days. Dima took a deep breath. As she opened the door her expression was calm and collected, the muscles at her temples taut.

Rassiem stood outside, hot, pale, dusty, with disheveled hair, and wearing his motoring coat. Without a word he pushed her into the dark hall, sank at her feet, and clasped her knees, which she felt weakening in his arms. His hands were trembling to an alarming extent, and he stammered unintelligible words, with his head pressed against her skirt like a passionate child. Dima stared past him into the darkness with strange eyes, while her hands unconsciously stroked his hair.

"Do you belong to me?" she whispered. He clasped her knees still tighter so that she swayed, and answered her with something like a sob. "Completely?"

"Completely yours, dearest—"

She bent down and pulled him up and into her twilit room. Here he sank exhausted on the sofa, took her hands and kissed them repeatedly, murmuring ridiculous endearments.

"You struck me," said Dima and tried to look in his eyes.

"Because you made me crazy, because I am fond of you, far too fond of you; because I could not bear to be so completely in your power. One mustn't give oneself away so much, love anyone so intensely—"

Dima laughed with flashing teeth, a deep, soft laughter that enveloped him. "I know, you told me so once, right

at the beginning," she said in a strangely triumphant tone. "He who loves most, loses. And do you really love me more than I love you?"

He pressed against her. His hands slid along her limbs. The torment that he endured was his own secret. *Maria,* he thought.

"I am completely yours," Dima whispered weakly. "But I have to share you." *Shadow, shadow, won't you ever die?* was the question that rose in her innermost being.

He let her go. "I am faithful to you."

"And what about that room that you sit in like Bluebeard, murdering every woman who peeps inside?"

He was silent, defiant, and on the defensive.

"What now? What's to happen now, Hannes?"

"I want you. I can't live without you any longer!"

Dima took his head in her hands and bent her face over him. "On one condition," she whispered close to his eyes. Her warm, sweet breath robbed him of consciousness.

"What you will," he said as in a dream.

"That room is left unlocked; you'll give me the key," she whispered almost inaudibly. He was silent. Her mouth wrestled with his; tiny ice cold flames burned in his blood.

"Very well," he murmured weakly.

She threw herself, with a brief, uncontrollable cry, on his hand and kissed it. "I love you more than you know, more than you can understand; and I want to keep you," she said, suddenly very tired and gentle.

The lamps were lit in the courtyard and threw a faint light into the darkened room. Down below the car throbbed nervously and impatiently. "Come," said Rassiem.

Dima glanced round, gathered a few trifles together, and took the piano score under her arm. "Darling, I've learned the 'Liebestod,' " she said on the stairs.

Overhead the sky stretched pale and starless as yet, but

the lanes were like dark valleys; dust and mist hung like fog in the warm air, making the houses seem far distant. In the harsh glare of the car lights Rassiem saw how small and pale and hard Dima's face had become in those three days, with red hollows beneath her eyes cutting into her cheeks.

"My child—have you been crying?"

"I can't cry, not even when it hurts so much that I feel I shall suffocate. Only my eyes burn and my throat hurts. It is much worse than crying."

"I hurt you," said Rassiem, and repeated it again in amazement softly. "I hurt you." It was something new to him to be sensible of this.

Suddenly he changed gear; the car pulled itself together and raced through the silent suburban street. Dima leaned close to him, a quiet smile on her face. It seemed to her that she was driving through streets in a dream, with a pale theatrical moon rising above her, and air and clouds beneath the wheels. She closed her eyes, losing count of time and space; endlessly she progressed through a confused humming that seemed to consist of many colors, into an air that seemed to be as warm and tangible as a hand stroking the hair from one's forehead.

They stopped. With no idea of where she was, Dima stared about her, and discovered the light from the veranda shining over the bushes and meadows, moonlight glinting on the fountain, and up above, caught in the top of the lime tree, the beam of light shining out of the orange-yellow square that was the bedroom. She felt herself lifted up and carried over the steps; a wild vine branch brushed her face and hot, trembling lips were laid on her closed lids.

That night the shadow was dispelled. That night it seemed to Hannes Rassiem for the first time that he could forget his wife.

Marvelous days followed. Dima walked through the hours with soft, loosened movements and gentle eyes. This was love, the great passion at last. She was affectionate, quietly submissive. Her hands learned to stroke, to soothe and give peace. Rassiem knelt before her, his face grown young, beaming with sweetness and affection. Berger ran about the house tying himself into knots in his anxiety to please. The roses climbing up the walls of the house gave off a stronger scent than before. The fountain sang glistening in the sun. Colors, sounds, scents were all increased in intensity. The days passed shrouded in silver veils; the evenings, which were heralded by rosy clouds, seemed enchanted; the nights glowed with depth and stars.

Clasped in Hannes Rassiem's arms, her head upon his breast, Dima asked sometimes, "Can one really be as happy as this? Is there really so much happiness? And how long will it last?"

And he whispered with closed eyes, without thinking, "Forever. Forever." Dima's mouth contracted a little. *Forever is a long time, forever isn't possible,* she thought, with a slight burning in her breast; but she did not voice her thoughts.

Dima looked at Hannes Rassiem and saw through him. He no longer sat upstairs alone; but he did not even enter that room in her company. Sometimes, hand in hand with him, she hesitated on the threshold, but he always passed on, falling silent. One evening there was a light still burning there as he carried her past the open door to the bedroom. He carried her high and secure, her head hung back on his shoulder; through half-closed eyes she saw this reflected in one of the mirrors in there. And he saw it too. And his lips were lifted from her hair. *Shadow,* she thought, *do you still live in that mirror?* and her throat was full of the old bitterness.

Sometimes she stood alone in that room, naked before

the mirror, and wished most urgently that he might come and embrace her, here, in front of this mirror, in this room. This wish haunted her like a gentle torment that made her kisses more eager, more burning, her caresses wilder; and yet always there remained an unsatisfied longing.

One day it was very quiet in the house. Over the meadows hung a dancing afternoon haze; the roses gave off a slightly faded scent like wine that has been standing. Rassiem had heard Dima singing earlier, but now all was suddenly quiet, and he went downstairs to find her. The garden was silent, but from the fountain came a soft, intimate laugh. Dima stood there, unaware of him. She was naked, brown, stretching her limbs indulgently in the splashing water, which she welcomed with soft laughter. She had laid her hands with caressing pride about her breasts, which gleamed wet like bronze.

At this moment Hannes Rassiem's love for Dima was so strong that he was frightened, and raised his hands in an unconscious gesture to his eyes, as though he were dazzled.

She saw him, gave a sharp little scream, and raced away on bare feet. He snatched at her; she splashed water at him with both her hands. He ran after her, over the meadows, through the garden, through the house. The soft, alluring laughter was sometimes here, sometimes there, now in the hall, now on the stairs. He ran after her into that room, where she stood bathed in the ray of sunshine shining aslant it. He saw her reflection in the mirror. Her flesh glowed translucently. He reached out for her, and wrestled with her; her eyes became very dark and serious, and in his eyes, too, arose that ominous desire that she knew and loved above everything. She let herself fall and pulled him to her into a whirling infinity.

"Now you are mine—all mine," she murmured beneath his kisses.

"All yours—yours forever, ever," he whispered.

The wallpaper of the desecrated room became a confusion of red and purple before his eyes, and Dima's sharp scent of thyme mingled with another, that was faint and sweet like a memory. Poor shadow, poor dead shadow; poor dead shadow; her innermost being rejoiced, as she allowed herself to succumb . . .

At the beginning of August, Hannes Rassiem received a telegram, and quite suddenly, without farewell, without a word of explanation, he vanished.

Chapter Sixteen: THE UNCERTAIN HEART

THE HEAT LAY OVER MERAN LIKE A PALL; the sky was almost white and the jagged outlines of the snow peaks bit into its brightness. The esplanade with its empty benches looked a dusty green. The water glittered as though thousands of silvery lizards were darting to and fro. The white walls and balconies of the houses facing south shone blindingly in the sun. In the old part of the town people hugged the arcades and shady corners which offered a certain degree of stony coolness.

In a hotel room into which green light filtered through closed shutters Hannes Rassiem sat opposite Professor Bayer, who was talking to him softly. Rassiem looked pale and exhausted; smut from his train journey was still clinging to his pale eyebrows, his hands with their swollen veins were fidgeting with Bayer's spectacle case, which they had found on the table. In the next room an occasional carefully muffled footstep could be heard.

"I don't know where I am; what does it all mean? What does it all mean? She's ill. Seriously? Seriously, Bayer? Your telegram was stupid and confusing. It frightens me not to know what is the matter. Can't I go to her?" Ras-

siem asked.

"Quietly, quietly, she's asleep now. Be quiet; don't make so much noise. I'll tell you the whole story. Dangerously ill? I don't really know. It's her nerves. It's knocked her out. We'll see what can be done. But to begin at the beginning. It was like this. Madame Kouczowska was sitting on the Punta San Vigilio resting; she was feeling much better. One day she suddenly thought she might try to sing; so she sat down at the old piano in the reading-room, and sang. And lo and behold, all went well. The room was a small one, with nicely curved stone walls—well, anyhow, you know it—and her voice resounded. Fine! thereupon Madame Kouczowska sent a wire to her old Bayer who was in the Dolomites: 'All is well, leaving tomorrow, shall be in Misurina Sunday.' Very well, I leave for Misurina, wait there for three days, four days, a whole week—no sign of the Kouczowska. But she was always like that, our Kouczowska, always a little bit crazy, and so I did not worry. On the seventh day a wire, which had been following me all round the Dolomites, arrived from Bolzano. 'Frau Kouczowska seriously ill, don't know what to do. Helene Muckenbauer, Maid.' Who on earth is Helene Muckenbauer, Maid, I wondered?"

"Madeleine," said Rassiem mechanically.

"Exactly. Madeleine it was. I left for Bolzano immediately, found the Kouczowska with a high temperature, delirious, in a dreadful state, Helene Muckenbauer, Maid, in tears, and my colleagues at their wits' end in the anteroom, for Madame would not allow anyone near her, but cried all the while for Hannes, Hannes, mixed up with all kinds of things in every conceivable language. Even Danish—"

"I once taught her three words—but that was a very long time ago."

"Yes, Rassiem, I know those three words only too well. She has repeated them over and over again. One could

guess their meaning from the tone, without reference to a dictionary."

Rassiem bowed his head in his hands. "Go on. Go on."

"The first thing I did was to wire you, and then I endeavored to find out what had happened. Well, Madame left the Punta, and in Riva met a few friends and suddenly changed her plans. She went with these people to Milan, where there was to be a large garden party at the Countess Triangi's. She appeared there in a marvelous silvery green gown, and was implored so insistently to sing just one little song that eventually she actually gave way and sang. Something pretty dreadful must have happened to her voice, I can't get to the bottom of it, but Madeleine says, 'Madame came home in a most distressed condition, cried bitterly while I combed her hair, and didn't sleep all night.'

"Next morning our good Kouczowska wanders in to see Professor Cechi—you know the man, he attends all the people at the Scala—and lets him examine her ruined vocal cords, without giving her name. The idiot doesn't recognize her, and states quite bluntly, 'Ridiculous. You'll never be able to sing again.' 'Is it quite hopeless?' she asks. 'Quite hopeless,' pronounces the doctor, and shows her out. This story plays an important part in her feverish ravings, that's why I know so much about it. Well, she goes back to her hotel, looking like a ghost, has her things packed in a tearing hurry, and rushes off by the very first train. In Bolzano there is an hour's wait, and she eludes Madeleine, who for the moment stays at the station to look after the luggage. Here there is a hiatus. Somewhere or other she fainted in the street and was taken to a first-aid station. Madeleine waited until late at night at the station, and then went to the police. Eventually she found her mistress, and had her transferred to a hotel. In the meantime the Kouczowska had developed a high fever,

the manager of the hotel became unpleasant, and Madeleine wired me. I dashed here by car, bundled her ladyship and maid into the car and drove here, where it is nice and quiet. And there you are."

"And now?" asked Rassiem.

"Now?" asked Bayer slowly taking off his spectacles. "She has been asleep for the past fourteen hours. One might describe that as the Crisis. When she wakes up the worst of the fever will be over and she'll be conscious. The worst is yet to come. You'll have to help her."

"I?"

"Yes, you, of course. She is fond of you. She is constantly calling for you. And what about you?" He looked at Rassiem with a quick, searching glance. "You once told me, not so long ago, that you felt yourself strong enough to help her over this. What about it now?"

"It's not so simple," murmured Hannes Rassiem dazedly. The tumult of the past weeks enveloped him like a cloud. "I am dead tired, I would like to sleep, and sleep and sleep," he said in a strange high singsong voice. Bayer raised his head, put his spectacles on briskly, and looked at Rassiem.

"Your feelings don't count at the moment," he said shortly; and after a pause he added, "Have you been getting into mischief again? Drinking? Leading a hectic life? Oh, what a foolish world. How you two people do torment one another!"

Rassiem was not listening. His head was bowed in his hands, he sat hunched together, and his shoulders were shaking. Then from the neighboring room came the sound of a weak, dreamy voice.

"She is awake," whispered Bayer hurriedly. "I must go and see her. Go and have a bath, and freshen yourself up. Here, take some bromide and quieten your restless hands. Off you go—I'll fetch you when the time comes."

A door opened softly. When Rassiem turned round Bayer had already left the room. He noticed for the first time the light furniture in the hot green twilight of the room. He went to the window and looked through the cracks of the shutters out onto a balcony on which were wicker chairs and stiff palms. A weak voice penetrated from next door and a vague medicinal smell. *I have been through this before,* he thought as if he were in a dream. *I know all this, this hot room, the palms outside the window, and Maria lying ill next door. I'm waiting to hear what the doctor has to say. I've experienced it all, I know what is happening—*

Suddenly a memory that he had believed buried forever returned to him. *In Rio, when our child died. It was just like this. Our child? What did it look like? I cannot remember; it was so tiny, it could not stand the climate. It wasn't so hard for me when it died, but Maria became ill with grief. She thought it was her fault. Maria?*

He caught sight of his reflection in a mirror in the greenish twilight, and was startled. *That was when everything began to go wrong with us; everything dates from then. And now?*

Mechanically he picked up the glass with the bromide in it. "One should be able to forget what lies between," he whispered to the closed door.

Beneath the shower in the bathroom the heavy drowsiness which had enveloped him lifted a little. When he had dressed he could feel his hair falling cool on his forehead, and this gave him a feeling of freshness and newness. But when he returned to the room the atmosphere was hot and close, almost stifling. He gazed round the silent room and noticed with a faint shock that the door to Maria's room was open. He took a hesitating step forward. Inside her room everything was silent. Bayer and Madeleine seemed to have disappeared.

The Kouczowska lay with closed eyes. Her hand hung down in a gesture of infinite helplessness. Her heavy copper hair flowed over the faintly green pillows. She whispered without moving, "At last." Her tiny, dainty head appeared to him to have changed. An icy hand constricted his heart. Tentatively he drew closer, not knowing what to say. Carefully he picked up the hand and kissed it, first on the wrist and then in the blue-veined palm. Then he remained seated on the edge of the bed, not knowing what to do next. The Kouczowska opened her heavy dark lids, wearily it seemed, and scanned his pale eyes, with their dark pupils, his mouth about which were two new painfully weary wrinkles, and his hands tremulously fidgeting with the coverlet.

"Help me," she whispered almost inaudibly.

Clumsily he nodded and asked, "What can I do? Anything you wish me to, Maria."

Her glance became vacant, and she said almost aloud, "Do you know that I am finished?"

He was startled, at which she tried to smile faintly. It was the smile of a great lady in company, who has complete control of herself. It looked so pathetic and helpless on her emaciated face that a wave of tenderness swept over Rassiem. He laid his head in her limp hand and wept with her.

One evening a little later, while Maria was asleep, Hannes Rassiem sat on the balcony in the small ray of light cast by the lamp, staring at an empty sheet of notepaper; for now he must write to Dima. He thought for a long time, sighed, and began to write.

Dearest one—

But he could get no farther. A moth fluttered round the lamp. Rassiem watched it, took out a cigarette, stared at his pen, stood up and walked up and down, cautiously, for Maria was asleep. Thank God, she was sleeping and

was slowly improving in health.

He made another start, resolutely strode to the table and added, *Forgive me—* But when this was on paper, straggling crookedly in one corner, it looked stupid. He thought of Dima, tormenting himself with memories of her, searching for any word of hers that would have touched him like Maria's smile. But she was out of focus, a momentary thing, a reflection in a mirror, a picture by the fountain, a voice. His eyes saddened; he clasped his forehead in his hands and walked away from the table into the darkness. Down below the flat roofs of the town crowded one on top of the other. The stars twinkled mistily; a feeling of heaviness over everything weighed on Rassiem's forehead. In the bright light on the table lay the white sheet of paper, waiting.

Dearest one, forgive me— was all it said. Anger rose suddenly within him. He crumpled the paper up and threw it away over the balcony. It rolled down over a roof, bounced from a gutter, up into the air, and disappeared into the unknown of the small dark alleyways below.

Somebody laughed. Rassiem swung round quickly and nervously. Bayer stood in the half-light of the door, laughing behind his secretive spectacles.

"What's the matter? Why are you laughing? How long have you been watching me? What is there to laugh at?"

"Come, come, Rassiem, my dear boy. Why so angry? So nervous? We've got our nerves into a pretty state again, haven't we, Herr Kammersänger?"

Bayer lowered himself creakingly into a wicker chair and said sternly, "Sit down and listen to me."

Rassiem put out the light. "It hurts me—gives me a headache," he murmured.

"Headache! H'm, I was just going to talk to you about that. Headaches, eh? And nerves, eh? A quivering of the eyelids, a slight shaking of the hands, that's it, isn't it?"

Rassiem was silent.

"In there lies a woman, a poor, unhappy wreck of a creature, who does nothing but gaze at you, begging you to help her, for you are the only one who can. She may not say it in so many words; she's very proud, our Kouczowska—but I see her often clenching her teeth and fists to stop herself from crying. She never takes her eyes off you, Rassiem. And what about you? You wander about distraught, looking as though you'd like to run away not only from her but from yourself. Is that the best you can do?"

There was only the dim, uncertain blue light from the overcast sky, gleaming faintly on the spectacle lenses which were turned inquiringly to Rassiem. The latter sat buried in the shadows, moaning softly, "Don't torment me. I don't know. I don't know anything. I feel as though someone had struck me a blow on the head. Empty, completely burned up inside my head and eyes. Leave me in peace, all of you!" he said suddenly, pushing away from him with outstretched hands something that was oppressing him.

"Rassiem," Bayer asked softly, "have you ever thought what it must mean to lose one's voice? What it would mean to someone like yourself? No. Well, just let that thought sink in; give your mind to it for five minutes. Imagine what it must be like. Will you?"

There was silence for a time. Rassiem held his face in his hands. Bayer watched the bowed head closely and expectantly. "Well, can you imagine it?"

"No," whispered Rassiem. "I don't think I can."

"Even you might lose your voice," said Bayer with emphasis.

There was a long moment's silence. Suddenly Rassiem crumpled up.

"You'll have to make a start. You'll have to begin right

at the beginning. You must call a halt; otherwise things will go wrong with you too," Bayer pronounced over the bowed head. "Your wife is lying in there, and things have gone wrong with her already. Now let's just see the stuff you are made of. Pull yourself and this poor wretch of a creature out of the mire into which you have both been drifting—God nows why."

"But how am I to begin, how on earth am I to begin Bayer? So much lies between us. The theater and people and crazy affairs on both sides. And just now of all times You don't know where I've come from—and what I'm going through."

"I've rented a house for you in St. Leonhard. Very pretty, right in the woods; fig trees, peach trees, chestnuts a vine walk, and an old dame who does the housekeeping Tomorrow we'll pack up the Kouczowska and take her off there, and you two will just settle down quietly there You need it."

"What then?"

"You ask me what then!" asked Bayer. "But, Hannes surely you are fond of your wife?"

Rassiem gazed helplessly into Bayer's face. The past weeks whirled before his eyes: Dima, roses, wine, burning hot days, burning nights, a picture in a mirror. All over All that remained, a sickening void, a spinning weariness and numbness in one's head, an empty heart.

"I don't know," Rassiem whispered. Bayer took his glasses off with a jerk and stared at him, as he gazed sadly into the mist that hung over the hills.

Madeleine appeared noiselessly at the door and announced, "Madame is awake and is asking for Herr Kammersänger."

"Is she awake? So late?" he asked, and it sounded absent-minded.

Inside, the Kouczowska was sitting up in bed, the light

from the bedside lamp shining on her little face. She stretched impatient hands toward the door through which Rassiem must enter.

Chapter Seventeen: THE STILLED VOICE

THE LITTLE HOUSE LAY OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE, set back a little from the road, which led uphill. The tops of sweet chestnuts overhung the flat roof, from which showers of wistaria blossom fell in blue cascades to mingle with the foliage of vines and fruits that completely covered the walls.

"How pretty," said the Kouczowska as the car stopped. As Rassiem tried to lift her out of the car, she shrank imperceptibly away. "Madeleine will help me, I can manage."

Madeleine had been sent on in advance to get everything ready. And now she was standing on the small vine-covered steps, with a raw-boned country woman beside her, dressed in the local costume, trying to convey by a series of awkward bows that her house was at the service of the gentry and that she hoped they would be comfortable.

There was one room containing a large green stove with a bench round it; in an alcove an everlasting light was burning beneath the sacred pictures. On the table lay an immense country loaf beside a painted pottery dish of butter. The woman made a cross over the loaf with a knife, and began to cut it. It had a strong, sour smell. The Kouczowska gazed with horror at the enormous slices, but Rassiem courageously took a bite and laughed. The best bedroom, which was light and paneled in pine, had been prepared by Madeleine for her mistress. Red and blue country flowers raised their robust heads from pottery jugs; a pine chest had been arranged with the help of

much silver and cut glass as a dressing-table; and on the immense bed silk sheets lay in company with red-checked pillows. Roses and hearts gleamed from a gigantic, gay, antique peasant wardrobe; the lock on the door was heavy and beautifully wrought; and on the wall hung a fine copper holy-water dish. The Kouczowska wandered about among these simple things, looking like a dainty, ridiculous china figure. She smiled politely. "It has style and culture. And when one is used to a world of painted canvas—" Her face clouded suddenly, a veil seemed to cover her eyes, and she did not finish her sentence.

"I'm tired," she said. "I would like to lie down, just lie down and sleep. Madeleine will stay with me. No, thank you, Hannes, I don't need you. Don't stop—"

Rassiem shut the door behind him, and stood in his room, gazing out on branches laden with peaches, and a sky in which the first stars were beginning to twinkle very close at hand. *She'll find it hard to forget, very hard; if ever she manages it at all,* he thought. *And I'm supposed to help. Me? Good heavens, what can I do?*

Later he lit a cigarette and walked up and down the road outside the house, which vanished into the falling dusk. The air was cool and strong, almost tangible. A faint sound of bells, the good pungent smell of wood smoke and a vague meadowy moisture were borne on the breeze. .

Rassiem threw his cigarette away.

His hands, brushing some twigs, were damp with dew. In the village down below a light shone here and there behind red curtains; there was the occasional clank of a chain and a stamping in a stable, the secret ripple of a stream. Two voices drifted along the road and were lost at the edge of the wood; then all was quiet.

Rassiem went home and slept heavily and without dreaming.

During the first few days the Kouczowska was very tired

and weak; she could scarcely walk. The greater part of the time she lay in a long chair in the vine arbor by the side of the house. Immediately before her eyes hung two bunches of grapes, then came a sloping meadow over which there was a constant zigzag fluttering of white butterflies, then a wood of Scotch firs and chestnuts. Rassiem crept about the house on tiptoe but the boards creaked noisily beneath his striding stage gait, now in the room, now in the hall, now on the balcony from which red geraniums hung in streaming southern profusion. He would appear first in the path, then in the meadow, then among the blackberry bushes at the edge of the wood, and he would make elaborate circles round Maria, while she lay with half-closed eyes apparently oblivious of him.

For a moment he stood gazing at her in helpless and miserable expectation, and then he disappeared. When he had gone she smiled a little, her tired, strained smile that seemed to be veiled. Then he reappeared with a red-checked cushion under his arm, and nervously drew a little nearer. She was obliged to laugh.

"You are carrying it so carefully! It looks just like a checked baby elephant," she said. "What do you propose to do with it?"

He wanted to prop her up with it, and when he had done this, he stood beside her for a little while, trying to start a conversation.

"The air is marvelous," he ventured.

"Yes, wonderful."

"Wonderful. Have you noticed it too? Will it do you good?"

"I hope so."

"In a few days' time," he said brightly, "in a few days' time you'll be quite all right again. We'll go up to the Hohe Jauffen. You shall wear your green dress."

Maria just nodded, and the corners of her mouth

drooped.

"That's a nice dress; where did you get it? In Paris?" Rassiem essayed.

"I don't know. I think in Turin. Anyway, it doesn't matter much."

Discouraged by this attempt, he was silent, and after a little while he took her hand, which had clenched in anguish. Carefully he kissed the blue veins. When he let it go, the hand fell down limply. Maria's eyelids drooped so that it was impossible to see the expression of her eyes. Rassiem chewed a vine tendril, and suddenly disheartened, disappeared down the vine walk.

Even at meal-times conversation was difficult. There were awkward pauses during which the big dishes clattered too noisily. The peasant woman stood sternly by, and everything had to be eaten up. From time to time Rassiem tried to tell some story. Maria listened politely as though she were dining in company until, scarcely perceptible, touched by some word, some memory, her expression would change, and she would be even more reserved. Madeleine, who was serving, lifted her gentle, shadowed eyes to warn Rassiem and, with a start, he would begin to stammer, his sentences tumbling out as though they were running downhill. Then there would be silence again.

"I'm sorry," the Kouczowska said. "My nerves are in a dreadful state. Forgive me. I've become a poor companion. Go on. What happened during the *Walküre?*"

After the meal Rassiem rushed angrily into the wood, blaming himself bitterly. "What an idiot I am!" he said. "I trample about like an elephant. What damned stupidity drives me to talk of nothing but singing and the theater when I'm talking to her? What a heartless, thick-skinned brute I am! Surely I love her?"

But this question pulled him up short. He put his hands to his eyes and listened, listened to his innermost thoughts.

"No," he said to the rock that was staring at him like a face. "It's not the real thing. And she knows it too. I love her, but it's not the real thing. That is why she is always so reserved, always withdraws herself. It's not the same as it used to be."

Used to be; that, in his thoughts, meant before Dima came on the scene. Dima, young, blooming, passionate! *Why am I not longing for you? Why have you been extinguished? Far away, as though I had only dreamed of you? The sound of a voice, a picture. Dima?*

Meanwhile, Maria Kouczowska was sitting in the vine arbor, and Madeleine was holding a mirror before the tiny face. It reflected, in the green light, the sunken eyes, the tiny, weary wrinkles on the forehead and about the mouth. A weak smile forced its appearance.

"Finished!" said the Kouczowska. "Finished! Voice gone, looks gone, youth gone. Just tired to death. Finished. What does he think of it, Madeleine?"

"Madame will soon be well and beautiful again. Madame must not always give way to such miserable thoughts; Madame must think of cheerful things."

"Yes," said the Kouczowska, covering the mirror with both her hands. "We'll think of cheerful things. What, for instance, Madeleine?"

"Herr Kammersänger has also grown older since Brussels. Doesn't Madame think so too?"

"Also grown older. Yes. You said that very nicely, Madeleine. Yes, I think he has grown older."

"No, I mean, he has changed—I don't know how to express it—changed."

"Changed, yes," said the Kouczowska softly, and after a pause: "Run along now. I want to sleep."

Changed, she thought, *changed. Two new lines round his mouth, not actor's lines. An air of suffering, somewhat tormented, somewhat tired. Not so moody as he was, nor*

so thoughtless. Older. He is not so wildly attractive as he used to be; no, he is no longer so attractive. It is rather as though he had begun to think or to live. I would like to hear him now, to hear if his voice has also deteriorated.

Also deteriorated, she thought, and the tears were there again, within, burning her eyelids in the same anguishing way. "Be brave," the Kouczowska said to her little face in the mirror which she was holding close to her eyes, clinging to its smooth surface. *Poise! Don't let him notice anything; no, don't let him notice. He doesn't love you any more,* said her eyes to the dark eyes in the mirror. She let it fall, let her hands fall in her lap, and there they lay, like small, stiff, pale corpses.

Three days later, however, when Hannes Rassiem came down in a bad temper to his lonely breakfast he found Maria waiting for him, wearing her green dress. "Good morning, Hannes," she said brightly, with a smile that was only a little forced. "Will you try and take me with you to the woods?"

She seemed to be blushing, and his cheeks too became hot.

"But that will be lovely! How brave of you, Maria; I'm so delighted, my dear."

"Well, Madeleine had better get ready and come along."

"Madeleine? Why on earth should you always want Madeleine? I think she's quite unnecessary."

"She could carry the hammock."

"What's wrong with you, Maria? Are you afraid of me? Are you always trying to escape me? I shall carry the hammock, and you too, if necessary."

Maria bit her lip, and they set out.

Madeleine, with her soft, shadowed eyes, watched them both as they descended the slope of the meadow. The Kouczowska in front, slim and dark in the bright sunlight, very erect, her arms strangely taut and pressed close to her

body, and a golden glitter shimmering over her coppery hair. And behind her Rassiem, a grass stalk between his teeth, swinging the hammock, walking with carefully restrained short steps. Maria stopped at the edge of the wood, and rested a moment; the path here stole away into the shadows of the trees.

"Tired?"

"No, only I'm not used to walking with you. When I was lying in the vine arbor, it was here that I always saw you come out of the wood, wasn't it?"

"Did you see me?" asked Rassiem, touched by some incomprehensible pleasure. "Come, give me your hand; I must show you the way now."

Silently they entered the deep shadows. The ground beneath their feet crackled dryly. There was a whispering in the chestnut trees. High up above a little blue sky, a little yellow sunshine filtered in. The path became steeper, small rocks began to crop up in it. Hannes Rassiem pulled Maria close to him, she stood still, breathing deeply.

"Lovely," she said softly.

He gazed into her uplifted face, in which he could see the blood coursing beneath the delicate skin; he gazed at her mouth and eyes and smiled slowly. "Yes, lovely!"

"Do you know, it's ages since I was in a real wood."

"But this isn't a real wood. You must go to Denmark for real woods, firs and birches and moss. We'll go up there one day. How would you like that?"

She nodded a little and became silent and thoughtful. *One day,* she thought; *he says it so blithely. When will that be: One day?* And, startled: *Does he think that we shall always be together now?* She gazed at him searchingly, but he was already occupied with other things. In front of them was a clearing, overgrown with blackberries and broom. In the middle of it a group of birches swayed slowly and sleepily in the golden air. He put up the ham-

mock, lifted Maria in one powerful movement, and carried her through the undergrowth.

"You can rest here, it's like being at home," he said, a little out of breath, as he put her down. She looked at him, at the tiny beads of perspiration on his forehead. She could still feel the slight trembling of his arms caused by his exertions.

"Have I grown heavier, or have you grown weaker, since—?" She did not complete her question. In silence they exchanged one long look, both thinking of Brussels, of the last night they had spent together: That was so long ago—

"We've grown old," she said after a while, and this was the final link in a long chain of thought.

But Rassiem rebelled inwardly. *No,* he thought, *I don't want to be old, and you mustn't be old either. If my hands are trembling it is from embarrassment, and because you are behaving so strangely that one dare not touch you.*

The hammock swung to and fro. A tiny bird flew up out of the broom and bored its way up in great spirals into the heavens. When he was very high up, a tiny speck of black in the wide expanse of blue, a great jubilation burst forth.

"A lark!" said Rassiem almost tenderly. "Look, actually a lark! Have you ever watched a lark, Maria?"

"No, never; have you?"

"Yes, often. When I was a child I loved it. Can you hear it, can you hear it? First of all it soars, and soars and soars. And then when it's right up there its happiness bursts out, and it sings and sings and sings. Do you hear it?"

A shadow flitted across her face and was gone; a veil seemed to hang over Maria's smile.

"No, nothing's wrong," she said, as he took her hands in alarm. "Nothing—it hardly hurts at all now. You may

talk of it now. Go on with your story of the lark; it soars and sings and is happy. Yes, I can hear it. Strange; for the first time in my life I am listening to a lark singing. Tell me some more, Hannes. No, tell me, my dear, where you got those two wrinkles round your mouth. They are new, but you haven't realized it. They make you look a little tired; I like them. Tell me where they come from?"

Rassiem's heart began to beat faster. "No," he said hesitatingly. "What is there to tell? I am rather overworked, my nerves are on edge; no, there's nothing to tell. When I think things over now, there's nothing to tell. I seem to be empty-handed with nothing to show for it—except the wrinkles."

He thought a little and then he asked urgently, "Dearest, have I really got new wrinkles?"

But the next day when they were sitting beneath the birches again, Hannes Rassiem told the story of Dima. He told the whole story. The Kouczowska listened, lying with closed eyes in the hammock; her mouth twitched slightly. She said nothing. When Rassiem had finished, uncertainly, as though he were asking a question, she opened her eyes as if to ask, "Is there more to come?" But she only said, "Listen, the lark is singing again." And amid all the jubilation that floated down on the air, he laid his head in her lap and whispered, "Maria!"

And now when Maria spent her afternoons lying in the vine arbor, while Rassiem wandered afar in the woods, it was only rarely that the tears welled up. Her eyes were wide open, looking as though they had long been thirsty and were now drinking their fill. There were so many things to make one happy. Vine tendrils trembling in the sun, translucent grapes that were molded like precious stones, sunbeams caressing one with warm fingers, the dance of midges in the light, grass stems swaying in the wind, the strong smells of summer, rising oppressively

from the meadows; all this lived for her and gave her life.

Later on there was a small fair-haired personage to keep her company. It had come crawling round the corner on all fours one day, and with many groans and grunts had managed to stand on its feet, proudly displaying its red overall. Then, full of curiosity, it had drawn nearer.

"Good morning," said the Kouczowska with interest. "Who are you? Are you coming to see me? Come along, little creature!"

The creature crowed with delight, lifted its awkward little bare legs in the air, promptly dropped on all fours again, and propelled itself toward her. It made a few unintelligible, friendly remarks in its own particular language, and then, reaching the chair, burrowed its soft little face happily in her outstretched arms. She lifted it on her lap, and there it sat, its little limbs bursting with robust health, busy chattering in perfect confidence. A warmth radiated from the little body, sweet and strange and yet familiar. Restless little hands reached for her face; she held them gently as though they were flowers. "Lovely little hands!" she said. "Lovely little fingers, what are you seeking? What is your name? Is your name Wolfgang?" Suddenly there were unexpected tears in her eyes. "Is your name Wolfgang?" she asked almost inaudibly. "Have you come back to life?"

"Mamma," answered the little fellow, and the round head was buried in her breast, where it tried to go to sleep. The Kouczowska sat quite still. Her heavy eyelids were lowered, and she seemed to be ashamed. She felt so happy, she was filled with such a warmth of happiness that the very nerves of her skin were conscious of it.

That evening she asked Madeleine about the child. Its name was Leonhard, Lenzchen for short, and it was the illegitimate child of a waitress in Meran, the daughter of the peasant woman.

"How dull," said the Kouczowska, dismissing the subject. But secretly she fetched the child every day to the vine arbor and played with it; and when Rassiem returned from the woods he found her changed, with a new light in her eyes.

Chapter Eighteen: FIRE AND FREEZE

IT WAS STILL SUMMER, but already there was a breath of autumn in the air. The grapes hung heavy on the vines, growing a deeper blue each day. Carmine-red peaches hung in the espaliers round the house, and in the woodland clearing the blackberries gleamed like black lacquer. The atmosphere seemed to be veiled in blue. Once a white thread blown on the wind clung to Maria's arm.

"Gossamer," she said. Rassiem, who was striding beside her through the meadow, softly stroked her hand. "Maria's hair!"

A little thing like this would make her blush. She put her hand beside his, and it gave her pleasure to say, "How brown you are, how healthy!"

He clasped her hand firmly. "And you, Maria? Look at me!"

They stood still, gazing at each other without speaking, and then walked on. After a long silence he added, "Yes, you look well, your eyes are clear. And what strikes me most, Maria, is that you have grown much simpler—simpler; I don't know how to express it. I could never understand you before, could never see through you. Everything about you was contrary, complicated, and the opposite of what one expected. I never knew if you were happy or sad. You always hid yourself. You did not want me to understand you. But now—"

"Now, Hannes?"

"Now you have grown beautiful," he answered unex-

pectedly. "Beautiful and dear, Maria. But you must learn to talk to me about one thing."

"What is that?"

"Madeleine tells me that her mistress sometimes cries during the night; she says she can hear her sobbing—"

"Are you spying on me through Madeleine?"

"No, not spying. It is only that I would like to know what is the matter with you, what is hurting you?"

"Don't you know? Must I tell you?" she said in a strangely harsh voice. "No, you don't know; you have no idea how other people feel. Leave me alone—you only care for yourself." Her mouth twitched slightly and became scornful, and she withdrew again behind her barrier of reserve.

"Maria, I thought you felt the same as I did! Don't you feel that we are different? During this time we've changed for the better. But you hide yourself, you shut yourself away and leave me standing outside, so that I can't bring myself to say what I am longing to, Maria."

Politely and a little wearily she said, "I am going home. I'm very tired. I want to be alone."

Rassiem turned pale, but he stepped to one side and left the way clear for her. At dinner that night they talked only of the weather. Rassiem smoked many cigarettes. The next day he set off on a tour through the mountains and left Maria alone for a few days. When he returned, he found her inexplicably changed, friendly and unreserved. Disturbed by this, he disappeared to his room to give himself time to think. When he came down again, it was already twilight. Maria was sitting outside and looked toward him with hot, unseeing eyes. He was shocked. He knew that look of old.

"Maria, have you been singing?" he asked sharply.

She awoke and passed her hand over her face as though she were putting on a mask. "Singing? No. I can't sing any

more. Just reading."

He reached for her hand which hung down clasping a book, a young poet's play. "Have you been so completely carried away by this?" he asked suspiciously.

"Perhaps. I am not sure that I have been carried away by anything, Hannes."

"But your eyes, my dear—"

"Oh, Hannes, stop psychoanalyzing. Come and sit down beside me. Madeleine can bring you some tea or milk; yes, you may smoke."

He sat impatiently watching her pour out tea. She had grown strange again, the Kouczowska of the great world; one could not fathom her. She made conversation, smiled her polite, restrained, well-bred smile, and handed him tea and cake with the graciousness that he knew from her receptions. Realizing that Maria had asked him the same question for the third time, he pulled himself together. "Don't you agree that a dramatic role like that is much more interesting than all the Carmens and Neddas rolled into one? Imagine creating something like that! Imagine playing it! A real person!"

"Boring stuff," he said, contemptuously gazing into space. She broke off. Her teaspoon clinked quietly for some seconds. Then something quite unexpected happened. It arrived, red and smiling, round the corner of the house, and beaming with delight rolled faster and faster toward them. "Mamma!" it shouted and scrambled up with its fat naked legs onto the Kouczowska. She blushed, and pretended for a moment not to recognize it, but the little head was buried in her neck, and the little hands were at her face, trying to stroke it. Hannes Rassiem put his teacup down, raised his eyebrows, and asked in amazement, "What on earth—is—this?"

"This is little Lenzchen; he belongs to the house. I can't imagine what he wants from me, I really can't

imagine—"

"But you are such good friends! He's so trusting! How's that?"

"Well, he just knows me; he's just a friend of mine; I don't know how. Run along, run along to Grannie, Lenzchen!"

Lenzchen didn't want to; Lenzchen was quite happy. The peasant woman dashed up, snatched the screaming bundle of misery, and disappeared with him round the corner of the house, to return in a moment full of apologies. It was because the lady was so good to him and played with him such a lot. Children always knew if anyone was fond of them, and now Lenz believed that the lady was his mother. She hoped the lady and gentleman would accept her apologies— And then she disappeared.

"Well, well, well!" said Rassiem, lighting his cigarette, which had gone out since Lenzchen's appearance.

"Why do you sit there staring like that?" asked the Kouczowska. Hannes Rassiem's eyes were wide with astonishment. There was no more conversation after this.

In the evening, after dinner, Rassiem took his usual walk down the road, where the veiled red lights of St. Leonhard twinkled. He walked slowly, deep in thoughts which roused a secret, soft laughter within him. *Is this your secret?* he thought with tears in his eyes. *Maria, darling, is it this that has made you a new woman? How well I understand now, your eyes, and why your mouth should twitch so.*

The mists rose from the meadows; he turned back, driven irresistibly home. He stood still and laughed to himself, and went on, and ran, ran on laughing. The window of Maria's room was open, and a faint flickering light fell on the bushes and the garden. Inside he could hear her voice. Softly he drew nearer to the lattice and looked in.

Inside stood Madeleine, brushing Maria's heavy red hair; a candle reflected in the mirror cast a small restless double circle of light.

"And why shouldn't it be possible?" asked the Kouczowska—more of her reflection than of Madeleine. "I was always a good actress, wasn't I? It's the next best thing. And my voice should be sufficient for that; it has got to be sufficient, hasn't it, Madeleine?"

"Of course. Especially as the voice is so well trained."

"No, no. I should have a lot to learn, I should have to begin all over again. It's not a small matter to become an actress. And I dare not be a bad actress. Everybody must be made to feel at once—that is the Kouczowska. Despite everything. It must be possible." She sat up, threw her head back. "I will do it; it must be done," she said again. Hannes Rassiem felt a stab of pain; it seemed to him for a moment that it must be Dima in there, speaking so ambitiously.

"It fascinates me," she said. "They were so quiet, these women; their fate is written on them. It is obvious, from the very first scene. One has only to unroll the film. And it is all so true. In opera, on the other hand, everything is false. One becomes quite indifferent. But as for playing it?" Her eyes became vacant and distant. She reached for the book. "I already know the first act. I don't think it will be too bad." She stretched as though in relief, bending her head far back. "Oh, God! to be in the theater again, to be standing on the stage again, to be in the midst of it all again! I cannot live without it."

Rassiem jumped down from the wall and fled. The evening air was cool against his face, which was burning with blind rage. He raved. He snatched at branches and shook them, he pulled grass up by its roots, he beat his fists against his temples. A blinding pain burned within him as he ran downhill from the village like one possessed. Half-

way he stopped, gasped for breath, gazed at the sky whose stars were wheeling above him. And brokenly he whispered, "You poor, poor darling." He turned back and was soon at the house once more, pressed against the wall.

Maria was now lying in bed, her arms crossed behind her head, and she was gazing at the ceiling. She said something. It was not right. She said it again, aloud and quite distinctly; then again, dying away at the end. And again and again. Suddenly her face became expressionless, for Madeleine opened the door and brought in a glass of milk.

"That is all, Madeleine. Good night. Oh, Madeleine, is the Herr Kammersänger at home?"

"No."

"All right. Go to bed."

Madeleine went. Maria lay still for a while longer, then she sat up and crossed her hands over her breast in a strange manner as though experimenting. Rassiem stared; his lips were dry. Then she took a deep breath. Kouczowska was singing.

Softly and cautiously she commenced the tone, which was a little rough, as though there was some strange element in it. Then she filled her chest and let the note grow and grow; for one second it was clear and strong like a beam. Then it cracked, and was finished. The Kouczowska clenched her fists, her eyes were feverish. Again she began the note, again and again.

Rassiem trembled with a pain such as he had never experienced before. He dug his nails into the wall, mortar crumbled into the bushes and evergreens. Suddenly he jumped up, swung himself onto the window sill, and stood before the Kouczowska. Gasping for breath, he gesticulated wildly, and then the flood burst from him.

"I forbid you to do that!" he shouted. "Do you hear, I forbid it. I forbid you to sing. You mustn't, you mustn't, you mustn't. I will not permit you to become an actress, I

forbid it. You're not to have anything more to do with the theater. You are to be my wife, do you understand? My wife. No, you don't understand that, you don't even know what it means: to be a wife. Your wretched ambitions and your damned art have ruined my life. You have belonged to everybody but me, never to me. You've tormented me, Maria, how you have tormented me! You've made me jealous until I could have murdered you. And when I was fondest of you, you became most distant: the Gräfin Kouczowska, the famous Kouczowska. Hiding behind a mask. Oh, yes! I could play at that game too, but I wouldn't do such a thing to you. To you! I wouldn't do it to the merest chit of a girl. I am I. But to you I am no more than a servant, just the handsome valet to whom one does not speak, with whom one retires to bed after the performance for the sake of excitement.

"Maria, I have loved you so, loved you so intensely. But you are not going back to the theater—I'd rather kill you. Callous—I'm not callous. Everybody looks at me reproachfully and says, 'Rassiem, that brute, that good for nothing, that drunkard.' Maria, I beg you to believe me—it isn't true, I'm not bad. But you've done nothing to hold me, you've never been my wife—you could have made anything you liked of me. Look at these past weeks! Have I been drinking? Have I looked at another girl? Have I been brutal? I've pulled myself together, I've turned my back on everything, everything. Theater, the town, Dima, Dima! And she meant a lot to me, Maria! I wait on you hand and foot, waiting for you to return to me. I'm telling you the truth.

"When you lost your voice I was glad, glad. I thought you would belong to me at last, would be my wife, would help me when my bad times came. You've no idea what it is like then; it is like paralysis, like an illness. But you've never helped me. Any little ballet girl, any street girl can

help me during those times, but you won't. You're cold and proud and without sympathy. You won't have anything to do with me. Just think a little—I wasn't always like that. Just think what a great simple stupid fellow I used to be in the beginning. Oh, God! how happy I was then, when I won you—unbelievably, childishly happy. You too, Maria, think of those early days: Italy, Paris, America. And when the child was born, do you remember? But even at that time you were no wife, you were mad on your singing, dragging the wretched child to that frightful climate in Brazil. That was when everything went wrong, that was when you ruined my life with your brilliance and success. You're intelligent, and you use your intelligence like a knife to wound, but not to help. I'd like to hit you, beat you—

"And even just recently. I thought everything was going to be all right. I have been careful, as careful and considerate as I could be. I could feel that you had a secret. I racked my brains to think what it could be, for I'm not as clever as you. Poor fool that I am, what things I have been imagining! I ran about outside laughing and crying. She wants a child, a child. Idiot, oh! idiot that I am, I believed everything would be all right now. And you lie there trying to sing, trying to sing with your ruined voice. Now you want to be an actress? You've no idea in your head but this wretched theater business, those dirty stages, smelly dressing-rooms, colleagues crowding about you, and admirers whose mouths are watering for you. That's what you need, that's your world. That is our world. One forgets that there are such things as growing woods, and meadows and a clear sky. Don't go back to the theater. I will help you, I will hold you so close, let me hold you; let me give you a child. But don't go back to the theater. If you do, I shall beat you, beat you—"

He took her by the shoulders and shook her; the per-

spiration stood out in beads on his ashen face. He felt incredibly relieved; he could have gone on shouting like this for hours; it gave him the sensation of bathing in a tremendously strong, overwhelming stream. The candle had burned low; by its wild flickering he saw close before him Maria's white face transformed by a strangely unconscious smile. Suddenly he became aware of the tender warmth of her trembling shoulders beneath his hands. He became aware of her. He was overwhelmed with giddiness; his knees gave way.

"Don't look at me like that—not like that, Maria. Why are you looking at me like that? Have I hurt you?" he whispered chokingly and full of concern, and he felt himself slip down to the edge of the bed. His head fell heavily against the bed, then Maria's hands, Maria's lips were on his hair and temples. She whispered over him, but he could not understand; she drew him to her and he heard his own voice like that of a stranger, far away in the distance, speaking in a spinning, rushing, exquisite warmth. "You belong to me, you belong to me, you are mine. I have been waiting for you, just you. My wife at last—"

The light was suddenly extinguished. Branches and stars swayed outside the window. "All will be well. All will be well," said Maria. It sounded like a sob, like a cry of immense relieving happiness.

Chapter Nineteen: THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE DOOR

EARLY ONE MORNING a weatherbeaten little man appeared and announced with marked respect that a registered letter was waiting for the gentleman in the village. If the gentleman would go and see the postmaster and take with him something in writing to prove his identity, he would receive the letter.

"A letter?" asked Rassiem, puzzled. "A registered letter?

Registered? Who can that be from? Nobody knows my address. How can anyone have written to me?"

"Bayer, perhaps?"

"Bayer? Well, it might be good old Bayer. He'll be preaching again, the dear old soul. But I don't want to be sermonized any more. I forbade him to write to me. I shan't fetch the letter. That's that!"

"But if something—"

"I just don't want any letters. Everybody would start writing to me then. I'm not obliged to read everything that people have got to say—people whom I've forbidden to write to me. Well, then—?"

Maria was silent. "You're bluffing, Hannes," she said, smiling quietly.

"Bluffing? Well, perhaps I am. Perhaps I'm afraid. We don't want any letters, Maria. We are so happy as we are, my dear; that makes me afraid. I don't want anything to disturb me, not even a letter. It might even be from the Opera," he added after a pause.

"From the Opera," Maria repeated brightly. *He must not notice how hard it was to say this. What was the use of shutting one's eyes,* she thought. *The world was waiting outside the door.*

Rassiem whiled away the morning in the garden and the woods as usual, the only difference being that he talked more, and threw away a great many half-smoked cigarettes. But before lunch he appeared in the room in his raincoat, with his hat and stick, and announced quite casually and indifferently, "I'll just go and fetch that interesting communication." The Kouczowska smiled at him, but, as he shut the garden gate behind him, her eyes clouded, darkened.

The road stretched before him white and sunny. The swallows were already gathering on the telegraph wires. Rassiem's thoughts revolved busily and unpleasantly.

That letter was from Dima, he knew. Only a woman in love could find one when one had hidden oneself away so carefully. She would dig one out of one's grave, that girl. *I ought to have forbidden her to write. I ought to have written to her. But what could I say? One can't write these things.*

The little village lay scorching in the midday sun. Two horses grazed behind a fence; mules, sleeping under their red nets, jingled their bells. Over the wide inn door was a sign—a bent arm holding a post-horn. A well-worn plate announced: *Lottery Office. Tobacco and Stamps, Post and Telegraph Office.* A weather forecast of the previous year was pasted on the door, which was shut—the whole house stood dreaming in the sun. A farmhand came by and directed Hannes Rassiem to the bar. The postmaster would be there at two o'clock—until then, the office was closed. Would the gentleman take a glass of wine?

"Till two o'clock! Damn it! My wife is waiting for me!" said Rassiem testily, but the man left him without a word. A cool green twilight filtered into the room through the ivy-hung windows. The oak table bore the marks and rings of old wine glasses, and the room was filled with the sour, vinous smell of a cellar. A guitar hung on the wall and a piano, an offense to the esthetic eye, slumbered beneath a row of antlers.

Rassiem stared at it with distaste, turned his back on it, but felt himself drawn to it irresistibly. He gazed at it distrustfully from an angle, and laughed shortly, for it really seemed as though he were afraid of it. And already he was striking the first chord. The piano whimpered a little, its old bones creaked, its pedal groaned, but slowly it began to work. It began harmlessly in C sharp, acquitted itself passably in a few out-of-tune passages, became reminiscent of *Die Meistersinger,* but immediately scurried away, pretending that nothing had happened. Rassiem stood strik-

ing the keys heedlessly and carelessly, not even looking at the piano.

Am stillen Herd, it suddenly began, quite clearly and distinctly; and again more courageously: *Am stillen Herd, zur Winterszeit—*

I believe the old box is a third flat, thought Rassiem; *that was never F sharp.* He cleared his throat, silently at first, and then softly he began: *"Am stillen Herd, zur Winterszeit*—as I thought; it's two tones flat, I must try and transpose. *Am stillen Herd, zur Winterszeit*—there, that's better—*wenn Haus und Hof mir eingeschneit*— No, one just cannot sing *piano* when one hasn't practiced for two months. Well, let it rip, nobody's listening: *Am stillen Herd, zur Winterszeit*— My God, how bad I am—*wenn Haus und Hof mir eingeschneit . . ."*

The clock on the wall wheezed and a cuckoo appeared, looked to the left and the right, and called once "Cuckoo!" Rassiem sat at the piano singing at the top of his voice and grumbling to himself. When the cuckoo reappeared a quarter of an hour later, Rassiem was listening carefully and singing AH—EE—OO—always on the same note. His eyes were those of a hunter. At one o'clock the chair was overturned on the floor by the piano, and Rassiem paced about the room, clutching at his tweed coat, upbraiding himself. This time the cuckoo stayed longer and listened, while the clock tinkled out a little tune.

"You fool!" said Rassiem to himself. "A pretty state your voice is in! Much good a rest has done you! Do you know how to sing at all? Have you got anything in your throat but saliva? Can you even remember how to produce your voice? Eh? Answer me that, you pig of a Wagnerian!"

At this point the cuckoo was obliged to retire into his little house, although there was more to come. At a quarter to two Rassiem was once more seated at the piano, sing-

ing neither too loud nor too soft: *"Am stillen Herd, zur Winterszeit . . ."*

At about two o'clock the farmhand announced the arrival of the postmaster, and set another glass of wine before Rassiem. The latter, torn from his labor, stammered something unintelligible, stood up, and retied his tie. Muttering to himself something about a dilletante, he tossed the glass of wine down in one gulp, for his throat was parched and dry, and stumbled across the courtyard in the dazzling sun to the post office. At the last moment, when the postmaster's gnarled hand was already plunged into the compartment for registered letters, a wild panic started up in Rassiem's breast. The hand reappeared and handed over with much ceremony a large, yellow packet. Rassiem threw one glance at the address, and heaved a deep sigh, at once relieved and unaccountably disappointed. For there was his name in Berger's unmistakable copybook hand, with all his titles tastefully adorned with flourishes. He felt the edges; it felt like music—a new role? His heart started to thump again. His thoughts turned for the first time to Maria, who had been waiting for him for hours, and he strode off as fast as he could through the drowsy midday heat. Somewhat breathlessly he climbed the hilly road, leaving the village far behind him in the dancing hot air. He walked on up the hill, between the fruit trees. At the very top where the slope curved down to the next valley, a small white figure stood outlined against the blue sky. Rassiem covered the remaining distance with gigantic strides. "Maria!"

"Heavens! What ages you have been! I thought you'd gone for good," she said, laughing and snuggling into his arms. "What have you been doing all this time? What did you find at the post office?"

"Nothing much after all!" he said with an uneasy conscience. "Some music or something. We can have a look at

it later, if you like."

"Music! Why, of course!" said Maria politely, though her throat contracted.

On the balcony after dinner the yellow packet was produced. Maria watched Rassiem's hands, trying not to betray their excitement, as they undid the string and seals. They tore off the last piece of packing impatiently, the paper crackled and fell, discarded, to the floor. On the table lay Rassiem's old, tattered copy of *Tristan and Isolde,* and a few letters slid out from among its pages. Rassiem picked them up with a quick uncontrolled movement. None from Dima, thank God, none from Dima.

"Tristan—" said Maria. She stroked it carefully, carefully smoothing the pages, a look of pain about her eyes and mouth. "Actually Tristan—"

"Oh, leave that old thing alone, Maria, please leave it alone. I don't want anything belonging to the theater to come here. You can see for yourself, it doesn't fit in here—it's out of place."

"What's to be done with this *Tristan,* Hannes? Why don't you read your letters? Who has written to you?" And then since he was looking at her so strangely and uncertainly: "I'm sorry—have I been indiscreet? I didn't mean to—I didn't think—"

"Have we any secrets from each other? Come, let's read them. This one is from Berger. Listen!"

Most Honored Sir, most respected Herr Kammersänger! wrote Berger, and the capital letters were masterpieces of calligraphic art. *As your Honor did not leave any address, I obtained same after inquiry at Herr Professor Bayer's, who sends his regards, and himself said, "I hope we won't start drinking and foolish behavior again, but that we will rest and drink plenty of milk; then everything will be all right and a respectful kiss of the hand to Madame."*

The young lady, that is to say Fräulein Dima, came once

or twice to the villa to inquire after the Herr Kammersänger, but I refused in the politest possible way to give any information. She is to be found frequently outside the garden, in the road, where I have noticed her in the dark when I lock the gate in the evening. Something has gone wrong with the shower in the bathroom and one day the whole room was flooded, so that the mechanics had a lot to do. There were some letters and Herr Gelfius has sorted out what I should send on. I also informed the latter, in answer to his query, that the young lady had taken the copy of Tristan. *Today received the same through Herr Gelfius with instructions to send it to Herr Kammersänger. The roses are flowering for the second time, but not very well. Finally may I be permitted to kiss the hand of Madame? The cook was wild with excitement when I communicated to her my conversation with Professor Bayer, and we are both convinced that it would be the greatest luck for us if everything was all in order again. In consideration whereof I have had everything spring-cleaned, and send my humblest respects in closing.*

Your obedient servant,

Berger.

P.S.—Your make-up box is almost empty—is the perruquier to fill it up again?

"Well?" asked Rassiem, amused. "Isn't he priceless? What style! What an elegant turn of phrase! No one can copy it. Now, what's Gelfius got to say. What on earth should he want with the music?"

Unparalleled one! Has Nibelheim swallowed you up? Has the devil seduced you? What on earth can you be up to, that can account for this long silence? I understand that immediately after your holiday you will have a great deal to do with a new production of Tristan. *Since I look after you like a mother, I have given the matter some thought and remembered that you have some atrocious*

patches in the third act, which you must study carefully if you don't want to get into trouble with the Director. For I believe that he would spot it. Well, my dear fellow: "Der Trank, der Trank, der furchtbare Trank," *and so on—that's it. I got the music after much trouble from the Di-matter. She looked rotten. She tells me she's been working hard at Isolde lately. No, I did not like the look of her at all, and still less the idea of your copy of* Tristan *with all its comments, knocking about with her. But I prefer to preserve a tactful silence on this subject.*

I had quite a good time this summer, swimming in the Danube, playing a lot of Bach; then I read through Edda again, and I am doing a spot of work myself; but mum's the word as yet. I've spent quite a few hours with Fräulein Kerckhoff and her father. We play a bit and I am learning what it is like to be in a big house. By the way, she told me to send you her greetings, but judging from your letters she seems to have done this herself. The rest were letters from agents and wine merchants and such like, and I didn't think it worth while sending them on to your secret abode.

You will have noticed in the papers (unless you are in "Spain or some other distant land, et cetera") that "The Conservatoire opens its portals on the 12th September"—a beautiful phrase that must have cost the secretary much perspiration. The opera begins on the 18th August with Fidelio. *S., who is singing Florestan, is sure to be much better than you. Oh! master! Sublime One! Doesn't this thought make you savage?*

In which sense I wish you a very pleasant holiday.

Gelfius.

Rassiem turned the letter over and over, read a few sentences again and threw it across the table.

"Bad taste!" he said. "Those jokes are stupid, and in bad taste! And this nonsense of sending me the music! He's heard something about a new production, indeed!

Why did he take it away from the girl? What am I to do with the music here? And his stupid joke about *Fidelio.* Hmm, the eighteenth, then; the very first performance, too!"

While he was reading aloud, Maria watched him with a strange anxiety. Her eyelids, her head sank lower and lower, "Maria," asked Hannes Rassiem, frightened, "what's the matter? Aren't you well? Darling!"

"It's childish of me," she murmured, "childish—no it's nothing. Only, all that forgotten world is pouring in on us again. Those good fellows: Berger, Gelfius. Heavens! Gelfius! And the cook is pleased. And the agents are writing to you. And the young girls are still running after you. And then: *Tristan! Fidelio*— Oh, dear—" Quietly she looked at her hands lying wearily in her lap. "And this Dima, who stands waiting in the street every evening, who is studying so hard that she looks ill. I can imagine her so well, can picture her, better than I can from your tales. She stands all day long in the road staring at the house, wondering if she'll catch a glimpse of you. Then she asks Berger, who 'politely refuses to give her any information.' So she stands there again, gazing, till evening, till it grows dark, till Berger locks up and notices her. Then she goes away, unsatisfied and studies Isolde at home—has she got a voice?"

"Yes. The loveliest voice I know."

"The loveliest—" said the Kouczowska. She sat quite straight and still, staring at her hands. It hurt horribly but she would not cry. She had promised to be brave, not to think of the theater, or of singing, not to yearn for it—no—not to pine for it—

"If only one's hands were not so empty—" she whispered.

Rassiem, startled, noticed her eyes and quickly knelt beside her. "Maria! Maria, darling! You're not jealous? You've never been that before, dearest."

You have never been allowed to know it, she thought, *besides I was so rich then, now my hands are empty—*

Meanwhile Rassiem was talking to her eagerly: "Jealous of that girl! You know very well that that is a thing of the past. What strange thoughts you do have: to think of her standing gazing at the house. Well, let her stand, if it gives her pleasure. You can picture her? Well, I can't—I can't." For a moment he closed his eyes and suddenly Dima was there. Dima, long forgotten, standing on the stone balustrade of the fountain, brown and noble like bronze, so close, so distinct that his hands could feel her warmth—

"Doesn't she write to you?"

"No. She doesn't write. She is hard and obstinate. But there—don't let's worry any more about her. Here's a letter from little Elis. She is sweet—a child, you know; you see, it will be a real child's letter—that will chase away stupid thoughts. Look, isn't that quaint—she starts slap in the middle without any beginning."

Every evening I write you long, long letters, only to throw them on the fire. They always say too much; I ought to be ashamed of myself. I just sit and write, scarcely realizing to whom. I think all the time of a picture that I saw as a child: A bound naked woman, and beside her a knight with closed visor. I don't know whose it was but it haunted me for a long time. It is like that now: I feel so naked. But you have closed your visor and I know nothing about you. Scarcely even whether you are fond of me? Then I think of that evening at Kahlenberg and know everything, everything. And I should like to sing and shout "Yes, yes, yes!"

Now you'll be saying again: Excitable child! and will be the Herr Kammersänger, Herr Professor, the famous Rassiem—in a word, a stranger. Then I feel ashamed of calling you in my thoughts "my dear." Don't be angry. For, my dear, you gave me a kiss—

Since Mamma died our house just shouts with quiet-

ness— I can't express it in any other way. I am very lonely. Always in the company of thoughts, and dreams and memories, and all of them always the same—boring to a degree. I have bought myself a map of Vienna and have marked in red all the streets I went along with you. That's a lot. And the long, long road to Kahlenbergerdorf—I re-live it again and again. I remember every tiniest detail—do you too, my dearest?

It was the loveliest thing I have ever experienced. And I shall soon be eighteen.

But I must pull myself together and write properly. My catarrh is a little better. I am singing again, very carefully; for as soon as I allow myself to get carried away, I become hoarse again. Gelfius is working with me a little. Gelfius is my friend; I like him, for he tells me so much about you. He is clumsy and strange, but I like him, for he is so fond of you and so loyal to you. He has told me about his ugly childhood and how you helped him, and he said that you were truly good, despite your reputation. That pleased me tremendously.

For sometimes I am overcome by a fearful anxiety and I feel that something must be wrong, that one day something dreadful will happen. I feel as though I have lost my way in a wood, in a strange dream-like wood. I have allowed myself to go too far because I was lonely; and because I had to find something, and I've forgotten what. I lie for hours in the garden, or in my room, a confusion of dreams and reality going through my head. Especially when I have a headache, and I'm blessed with plenty of them. Dima came to see me and asked after you. I couldn't look her in the eyes. I had the greatest difficulty to prevent her guessing how things were between you and me. She knows me so well. I should have liked most to fling my arms round her neck and tell her that he is fond of me, me, me!

Because of the quietness in the house, Father has given me a little dog, who seems to consist entirely of paws and ears. Gelfius was godfather. He is called Mr. Punch, because he is always making such a fool of himself. I am terribly fond of him. My father won't allow anybody to enter his studio, for he is doing a piece of work for Mamma, a monument for our vault. Sometimes he comes and has tea in my room. He saw Dima and said he would like to do her: nude, on a horse, with bow and arrow aiming at a target. The bow and the figure should have the same line. It was lovely the way he described it to her, but I believe if he did it, it wouldn't come right. He is very unhappy, I think. His sculptures are always so big, but somehow one feels so sorry for them. I don't think Father could ever do Dima as she really is—I couldn't. I couldn't tell Dima where you were. She wanted to ask you something about Isolde; she is working at it and looks very tired; she is working at the third act.

I don't know myself where you are, my dear, and my thoughts go out to infinity. Have you forgotten me and the little village of Kahlenberg? No, no, one doesn't forget such things. I have found out the kind of cigarettes you smoke, and am smoking a little myself; the scent reminds me of you. But Gelfius musn't know. If only I wasn't afraid, so desperately afraid—

There, that mark is where Mr. Punch put his paws—many apologies.

Maria laid the letter carefully in her lap and looked at Hannes Rassiem, who had been leaning over her shoulder reading with her, looked searchingly in his eyes.

"What nonsense," he said confused. "I can't make head or tail of it—just hysterical nonsense! And all higgledy-piggledy! And writing to me so familiarly! Why? Can you understand it? Silly child!"

"Yes. I believe I understand a good deal of it. What did

you do to her? She's no child. That is a real love letter, Hannes."

"Do to her? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Whatever can the child be thinking of? Let me see: 'Are you fond of me?' And: 'You gave me a kiss.' With the best will in the world I can't remember that. And what on earth does she mean by her everlasting Kahlenberg? I took the child for a drive once and was nice to her. But they are all like that. Well, she's welcome to her raptures, silly child, if they make her happy."

He reached for the last letter that lay on the table. "From the opera," he said quickly. "Darling, really from the opera."

"Yes? Well—Hannes?"

"Extension of leave granted to the fifth of September—let's see, that's scarcely three weeks—and then the new production of *Tristan* really does begin. I've a rehearsal as early as the sixth. Really, I shall have to get down to things; it's a good job the music is here, I shall have to start practicing again. We could return to Vienna on the third or fourth? Then I should be rested and fresh for rehearsal. What a pity we haven't a piano—" He stammered, stopped, for Maria's eyes were full of fear and tears.

"There, there," he murmured helplessly, and stroked her shoulder. "What's the matter now? Come, come, my dear!"

"Nothing, nothing; be patient with me," she whispered, and pulled herself together. But her self-control broke; she flung both arms on the table and sobbed, a deep, heart-rending sobbing, that shook her like a palsy. "I can't, I can't do it, I can't do it," she sobbed faintly. "Go away, leave me alone, I can't—"

Madeleine appeared, as though she had been expecting this. Rassiem fled precipitately, a chair falling to the ground behind him. He ran across the meadows, straight

to the village, and spent the whole afternoon at the piano in the inn. The cuckoo heard the most extraordinary things . . .

When Hannes Rassiem returned home, tired, relieved, and happy from singing, the evening had turned the vine arbor to gold. Maria was sitting under it with Lenzchen on her lap. Hannes stood still and watched. She did not see him; her head was bent over the sleeping child, and her eyes, mouth, and hands were calm and still. With one arm she supported the tiny body, and in her poor broken voice she softly sang an old cradle song.

"Auf dem Berge da geht der Wind,
Da wiegt die Maria ihr Kind,
Sie wiegt es mit ihrer schlohweissen Hand
Und brauchet dazu kein Wiegenband
Schum schei, schum schei, schum—"

Hannes Rassiem stole away. But in the middle of the night he awoke and saw by the vague light of the moon that Maria was awake, her eyes wide open and a quiet smile on her face, listening. "What are you thinking about, darling?" he asked very tenderly and when there was no reply: "I know—"

She shook her head slowly, smiling quietly. He drew her to him, drew her face to his breast and whispered, "Are you listening to yourself? Are you listening to the unborn? You must wish for it as much as I do. He shall be fair and his name shall be Wolfgang too; and he shall not die—"

He saw her eyes shining in the still blue night, and all was well.

But during the next few days a change came over Hannes Rassiem. A small voice kept worrying him, reminding him that in Vienna everything was running its normal course, that the theater had recommenced, while the tenor Rassiem was leading his new life here cut off

from the world. The louder and more insistent and tormenting this voice became, the more difficult it became to talk about it to Maria. There was an atmosphere of nervous tension about him, growing stronger from day to day. Madeleine raised her soft eyes and thought, *Soon there'll be the devil to pay again.* And the Kouczowska's thoughts were similar.

It all started quite harmlessly. Rassiem smoked a little more than usual and began drinking black coffee again. He slept badly, or rather he was so tormented by dreams that he often awoke trembling and bathed in perspiration. His dreams were always of accidents on the stage, on his beloved operatic stage, which appeared night after night in all its well-known familiar detail only as the scene of some nonsense or other.

Sometimes he was on the stage in *Tannhäuser* and noticed in the middle of the *"Sängerkrieg"* that he was wearing tennis flannels. Then again an opera that he did not know was being given, an opera he had never even heard of, and he made his way in bewilderment to the prompter's box, and gazed into the wings for the producer. The conductor, somewhere miles away, minutely small, who was conducting completely strange music, cried, "this is *Tristan;* don't you know *Tristan?"* From the pit and gallery sarcastically grinning heads appeared, staring at him. He tried to sing, found himself in the costume of King Mark, wearing a long beard, and desperately worried, for he was to sing bass and could not produce a single note. Somebody said, "Practice vocals on U, but only on U—"

Madeleine brought a tale to the house, which made the Kouczowska rouse herself, take her tired hands out of her lap and clasp them tightly together. She put on her green dress and walked down through the twilight to the village. Hidden streams gurgled, the second crops of hay were stacked high in the meadows. Blue smoke arose

peacefully from the roofs. Maria found her way to the postmaster's house, was directed across the courtyard, and then stood for a long time by the window. Inside sat Hannes Rassiem, singing *Tristan*. The Kouczowska stood listening. It hurt her, piercingly, and yet not as she had expected it would. It was wonderful to hear *Tristan* again.

She did not realize how pale she was as she opened the door. Rassiem, torn abruptly from the love-laden twilight of the second act, flung round, staring at her and stammering something unintelligible.

"I've been listening to you for a long time. How beautifully you are singing, Hannes, beautifully. I haven't heard you for so long. But why in secret?"

Slowly he pulled himself together, put on his collar and tie, and smoothed his hair back from his forehead. "I don't know, I was afraid of you, Maria. And, don't be angry; I *had* to start again, I couldn't contain myself any longer."

"I know," she said slowly, "you couldn't contain yourself. I can well believe it. No, don't be afraid, Hannes; I am brave, aren't I?"

They went away down the darkened street. Hannes Rassiem looked into Maria's quiet face and drew her close to him and as they strode along in step he dared to speak to her of the immediate future. She listened quietly, her mouth sometimes contracting a little, but she said nothing. She felt her husband's arm firmly clasping her shoulder and thought, *All will be well; it must be—*

The end of August came; rehearsals were to begin on the eighth of September. He wanted to return to Vienna, his idea being to go back in advance with the heavy baggage and get everything ready for Maria, before she returned with Madeleine. She should not see anybody that she did not want to, should not hear a word that should remind her, either of the theater or of singing, if she did

not wish it. Would that please her?

Maria merely nodded. She gazed at the house, which gleamed in the twilight, and suddenly a sentence in Elis's letter came into her mind: *It was the loveliest thing I have ever experienced—*

Yes, she thought, *this has been the loveliest; now comes the more difficult part, and I must just face it.*

Rassiem returned to Vienna on the first of September. When the car was waiting for him at the garden gate, Maria burst into tears. Her tears, her kisses were new, uncontrolled, different from anything that Rassiem had been used to in her.

Maria was to follow on the third of September.

It was late at night when Rassiem arrived at the villa, which looked quite strange. Berger stood at the door, swallowing hard; when the cook heard that her mistress was following later, she wept openly. Rassiem took a bath and fell into bed, tired out. In the middle of the night he was awakened by the deep-pitched chiming of the clock below. He awoke startled; he had been dreaming of Dima.

For two whole days Berger raged about the house. Although everything had already been cleaned and polished, fresh torrents of water, soap, and elbow grease were lavished on all the rooms. Evil-smelling decorators appeared to re-hang all the pictures, for Berger decreed that everything must be as it used to be. A charwoman swung a polishing mop backward and forward feverishly, until one was in danger of breaking one's neck on the shiny parquet, and then all the shining surfaces were covered with rugs. Finally the most hideous streamer imaginable was hung out on the veranda, screaming forth *Welcome.* The vases were full of flowers, somewhat tired autumn flowers, tea-roses with drooping heads from the garden. Rassiem walked about uneasily in the midst of all this excitement and cleanliness. He felt strange, he did not know quite

what was wrong.

The long-awaited evening arrived. He drove to the station and reached it much too early. He cast one glance into the dismal waiting-room, with its faded settees leaning against the walls like mutes at a funeral, and its one poster earnestly recommending the use of Fachinger mineral water. For an interminable age Rassiem sat on the terrace of the buffet, shivering with excitement. The minutes dragged on endlessly. At last the moment arrived. The gloomily lit platform was empty. Far away in the dusk colored lights gleamed on the railway lines. Everybody looked pale and cold. The signal sounded. Rassiem's hands and throat began suddenly to tingle with pleasure.

The train arrived, tossing steam, turmoil, and people onto the platform. Only a few people left the first class compartment. One old man came past, then a lady, then a porter who bumped against Rassiem's legs. That was all. Rassiem's heart pounded. The compartment was empty, and the stream of people on the platform thinned. He ran the length of the train, peering into every coach—nothing. Then a porter came along and said. "Off the platform, if you please, sir—it is closing."

"What's that?" asked Rassiem. "I'm expecting somebody, I'm expecting my wife."

"The lady must have missed the train," said the porter politely. Rassiem pulled himself together, gave the man a tip, and disappeared.

Maria was not coming. Maria was not coming.

Berger stood waiting by the car, incomparably correct and upright. He collapsed like a pricked balloon when Rassiem said hoarsely, "Home. The mistress has not arrived."

All the lights were burning in the house. On the festively laid table lay a letter. Rassiem's hand flew to it and tore it open.

Beloved, wrote the Kouczowska, the letters tumbling over one another. *I can't come, I just can't. I can't be at your side with empty hands in a world which I love more —have loved more—than it is possible to say. I cannot return yet to that world of warmth and enchantment, of singing, success, and work. I can't stand there like someone staring in at a bright window. Be patient with me. I can't come so long as I am empty-handed.*

Be patient. Think of the night when you were closer to me than ever before. I am waiting. If it should be true, if I should bear a child, then I will come to you. Then everything will be all right. Otherwise I can't come. Forgive me. Thank you for the summer, which was lovely. Be patient. I can't write what I feel—

Rassiem picked the champagne cooler up in both hands, lifted it high, and flung it to the ground. The bottles crashed, the ice clinked, water flooded darkly over the ground. He laughed. He was still laughing when he stood upstairs in Maria's room smashing his fists against the mirror. But when every picture in the mirror had been shattered to atoms he burst into tears.

Chapter Twenty: END OF SUMMER

GELFIUS HURRIED DOWN FROM THE UPPER LAKE of the Schwarzenberg Gardens, humming a little tune which followed a happy seven-bar rhythm of its own—a much more exciting idea than the everlasting eight-bar periods of the academics. First the oboe must begin alone; then would come a delicate lilting phrase by two flutes; a horn would introduce a little romance; and then the bass-viols interrupt with their characteristic syncopation.

And there was Elis. She was sitting outside the little châlet, gazing distrustfully at a half-empty glass of milk. Before he had even greeted her, Gelfius cried out, "My

third motif is finished!"

"Oh, Gelfius, how splendid! Will you play it to me? Today? Later on? Later—" she said more slowly, and Gelfius began to smile.

"Excited?" he asked.

"It's so silly. But I've been waiting all the summer. And now it's come to an end and the classes are beginning again. I can't believe even now that I shall see him—that I shall see Rassiem again today. Is it nearly time, Gelfius?"

Gelfius pulled his white carnations out of his pocket, puffed and pulled at them without greatly improving their crumpled appearance, and laid them on the table.

"How you spoil me, Gelfius! Always such lovely flowers —they just match my dress. Just look how my hands are trembling. Oh, dear—I'm simply wild with excitement, quite crazy. Isn't it time yet?"

As she pinned the flowers on her frock, he gazed down on her bowed head. "Drink your milk up first—you silly baby!" he said.

She looked up expecting to see him smiling; but she was startled by the sadness in his eyes, which seemed to know so much.

"You are very kind, Gelfius. Since Mamma's death you have been the only one to take care of me, with your milk —and other things. Shall we go now?"

It was a lovely autumn day; thin golden mists hung in the air; yellow leaves floated among the quiet black swans on the dark ruffled surface of the lakes. "Elis," said Gelfius. "Now the classes are beginning again, will you promise me—"

"What, Gelfius?"

"Oh, nothing; never mind. It is impossible to promise such things, let alone keep one's promises. Never mind."

They crossed the wide square before the castle and the Karlskirche. Vespers sounded from the green cupola, for it

was nearly five o'clock. At the corner of the Conservatoire they ran into Dima, who was standing pressed in a strange way close against the wall. She was wearing fine white kid gloves—they were the first thing Elis noticed—and she was buttoning and unbuttoning them incessantly.

"Dima! Fancy meeting you! Are you trying to hide? How are you? How are you getting on with Isolde?"

"Hullo, Elis! What do you mean—hide?" asked Dima hurriedly. "Do you know if—is Rassiem coming today? Have you spoken to him yet, Gelfius?"

"No. On the contrary I thought you would have the latest news of our One and Only. Nobody has set eyes on him for weeks. But we have reason to hope today. As the saying is, however: 'For further information, see the handbills.' There you are."

The walls were decorated with orange posters announcing a medley of classes, instruments, subjects, names, and dates. "Yes, there you are!" said Elis, putting her finger in the middle.

There it was: *Entrance examination for Herr Rassiem's class, 16th September, from 5 to 6 o'clock.*

"Isn't she a doubting Thomas, Fräulein Dimatter? Fräulein Dimatter!" Gelfius repeated, for Dima was not listening, but still buttoning and unbuttoning her fine, white gloves, and gazing vacantly over his shoulder at the corner of the building. Her face had changed, aged; there were lines beneath her devouring eyes.

"Come on, Dima, it's time we went in," Elis urged. Quite unexpectedly, Dima turned and dashed away. "What—on—earth—does—this—mean?" asked Elis of the air in astonishment; but Gelfius took her arm and pulled her away toward the main entrance. "We'd better leave her alone, Elis, she didn't look well. Many years ago when I was still playing in that low dive—I once saw someone gamble his last sou and lose; his eyes and lips were like

that. We must leave her alone."

"What do you mean?" asked Elis, watching his lips in fear; slowly she blushed and remained silent.

And here they were in front of the opened portals of which the newspapers had spoken so pompously. There was a great hum of talk, and a rich confusion of remarkable ties, long hair, and gay-flowered femininity. The buttons on the porter's uniform were brightly polished, and behind his imposing figure stretched the long cool corridor losing itself in perspective. But the walls, the beloved walls, had put off their holiday stillness, and resounded noisily with a confusion of organ, violin, and human voices. The school servants were dashing about with an air of importance tempered with friendliness, because on the days of the entrance examinations tips from anxious mothers and perspiring aspirants were prolific. The passages and stairs were overflowing with students who had no reason to be there but had simply been unable to keep away. Frau Gibich on the other hand sat knitting at her usual place by the window, which gave no light, and from time to time she scratched her false plait and called, "Gentlemen, do not talk to the ladies, please! Ladies, please sit on the other benches!" For the urge to ignore the proprieties was particularly strong today.

Meanwhile, in the basement, outside the small examination room, the new students were pushing and shoving in a state of unspeakable excitement. Herr Reindl was busy running backward and forward, spreading an atmosphere of good will and optimism all about him. The members of the Governing Board and the examiners made their way with solemn tread through the mass, followed by whispers and anxious glances. Whenever the door opened to admit one of them, it afforded a glimpse of one corner of a ceremonial green table and above it an ominous larger-than-life plaster nose, which belonged to a

plaster cast of Wagner.

Gelfius slipped out of the examination room for a second and said to Elis, "Rassiem hasn't arrived yet, and nobody knows whether he's coming. The telephone seems to have been cut off in his villa."

"The first gentleman, please!" Herr Reindl called, and a trembling apparition disappeared through the door after Gelfius. In a sudden silence chords sounded from within followed by the unusual sound of an untrained, wavering, but loud male voice. Elis escaped from the confusion of exotic and doubtful perfumes to the cool hall, where she stared mechanically at the empty notice-board. *This whole, interminable summer I've stuck it out,* she thought, *but if I don't see him today, I can't go on, I'm done for.*

The gates rattled, there was a smell of petrol, the porter flung open a garage. There was a light, loping tread on the steps, a glimpse of fair hair above a sunburned face, and broad, slightly stooping shoulders. Dizzily Elis clasped her face, holding up her hands as though under a shower. The green baize door closed behind him. All that remained was a smell of Eau-de-Cologne, cigarettes, and a clean, fresh-smelling English soap. An incredibly strong, burning, frightening happiness . . .

In a trance Elis thrust her way nearer to the door. Something hot and restless brushed her shoulders. She turned sideways and gazed into a pair of large, very childish eyes, that belonged to one of the newcomers. "Did you see him?" whispered the little creature mysteriously. "That was Rassiem. Did you see him? That was Rassiem, wasn't it?"

"Yes, that was Rassiem," confirmed Elis and was amazed that it should be true and all longing be at an end.

"How marvelous he is, marvelous!" said the little newcomer, and her eyes had almost a fevered brilliance in her queer, thin face. "You study under him, don't you? I recog-

nize you from seeing you in the gallery. I've often seen you, you and the tall, lovely girl who is walking round the building outside."

"Is my friend walking about outside?" asked Elis relieved. "Of course, I remember now, I've seen you at the opera too."

"I was always so envious of you, because you were allowed to study under him, but, think of it, I'm going to have a shot myself now. My teacher told me that my voice was big enough, but everybody says that I'm too small for the stage. What do you think? If I'm not admitted after today's examination, I shall die," she said, and her minute little person shrank even smaller. Elis looked at her and smiled indulgently.

"You're laughing? Yes, I know what you are thinking. You're thinking one doesn't die as easily as that." The newcomer whispered and nodded curtly. "But one does. One dies very easily," she said, and Elis was startled.

Little sister! she thought, but Herr Reindl was already pushing the child into the examination room. Elis set out to find Dima, who was supposed to be walking round the building outside; this Dima who had been growing more and more puzzling and strange. A misty twilight was already spreading through the street; the niches in the walls were filled with deep, black shadows. It seemed as though a blurred ghost slipped round the corner. Elis whistled the old signal, but received no reply. She went on round the building but only found a lamplighter, poking away at the standards and producing tiny, powerless lights that gave no light but only made white circles in the mist. The lamps were burning in the hall when Elis returned, reminding her forcibly of the winter when one came warm with singing from one's classes. Quite distinctly Elis pictured the gesture with which Rassiem always lighted his first cigarette.

The clock struck six. The atmosphere outside the door of the examination room was hot and thick. "All's well that ends well—I am the last," pronounced the blue-black young man who looked exactly like the baritone Lorm. He suffered from no lack of self-confidence as he strode with the correct stage stride after Herr Reindl. And there was the little newcomer, her eyes now burning almost painfully with excitement. "I've been waiting for you," she said, and her voice failed her. "I've been accepted; just think of it, I've been accepted. An old fellow with a bald head was positively beastly and kept on saying that I was too small: but *he,* just think of it, *he* praised my voice. He said, 'A fine coloratura voice, she'll make a good operatic soubrette. A fine coloratura voice,' he said. I've been waiting for you, I wanted to tell you all about it. I feel as though I'd known you for a long time. I haven't introduced myself yet, my name is Hartwig, Eva Hartwig. I wonder whether I've got any talent for soubrette parts? I don't think so! But he'll teach me, he must be a wonderful teacher, simply wonderful!" she repeated, squeezing Elis's hand. "You adore him too, don't you? I've watched you in the opera. You do adore him? There's no harm in that; it's only nonsense anyway. One gets a crush on someone, doesn't one?"

"Yes," answered Elis briefly. *If only you knew,* she thought, *that he had kissed me. He has kissed me. That isn't nonsense or tomfoolery.*

Herr Reindl plunged through the students and flung open the doors; with triumph on his face the blue-black youth came out of the room, perspiring freely; he had been singing very loud. Inside there was a scraping of chairs. The Director appeared, and behind him in close attendance came the Registrar, his portfolio bulging. The Secretary followed, and with him the important personages, the examiners and members of the board. And then

Rassiem stood in the doorway, beside Gelfius, lighting his cigarette in the old familiar way. At the same moment Elis noticed that something had altered his expression since the spring. She stood quite dumb, not realizing that her hands were stretched out before her, making words unnecessary.

"Elis!" said Rassiem with pleasure. Yes, one could see how pleased he was. "How are you? What have you been doing all the summer? Oh, yes, of course, you wrote to me; forgive me, I'm no correspondent; but you shall tell me all about it. And on Tuesday the class begins. Ladies and gentlemen," he turned to the new students, who were standing about filled with awe, "Tuesday morning the class begins. Room Number Ten. Don't forget. Good day!"

But he kept tight hold of Elis's hand and pulled her with him after Gelfius, who was waiting at the gateway. "You've grown, Elis. You're quite a grown-up lady. The young girl is finished with; here we have Fräulein Elisabeth Kerckhoff!" he said lightly, but his manner was strange. He had developed a new gesture of his long hand, as though he were trying to wipe something from his forehead that would not be moved. Gelfius gave him a sidelong glance; there was tiredness, and something else, beneath his freckles—age.

"What are you gazing at so intently?" he asked. "One might almost imagine that you were thinking, if that were not out of the question, with your absolute and complete indifference to what is going on around you, my dear Tenor!"

The word "tenor" jerked Rassiem out of his abstraction, as though it were the clue for which his thoughts had been searching.

"Tenor! I don't believe I am a tenor any more. No, Gelfius, in strict confidence"—he grasped his arm, and whispered—"my high notes aren't what they used to be; they

are deteriorating, and I can't do anything to stop it. You'll see for yourself; tomorrow we'll practice Tristan—"

"There's Dima!" said Elis.

Rassiem raised his head sharply. "Where?"

"No, it isn't. The street is empty; I must have made a mistake. I was looking for her earlier in the evening—she's so queer—I thought that was her, coming round the corner there in the mist."

Gelfius looked at Rassiem. "I wonder if she'll come on Tuesday," he said slowly, clasping his forehead. "Fog! What a disgusting evening! What on earth is one to do with oneself. One could just lie down and die. What are you going to do, children?"

"Gelfius is coming home with me to play me the symphony which he composed this summer. I may tell him, mayn't I, Gelfius? It is beautiful, Herr Kammersänger. I know a lot of it already, don't I? I'm the only one!"

"Are you two friends?"

Gelfius did not answer but gazed at Elis, with an urgent question in his eyes.

"Yes, friends," she answered.

"That's good. Gelfius makes a fine friend, don't you, you old rascal? And now he's going home with you and is going to play to you, Elis?"

"Yes," she replied, gazing with bated breath into Rassiem's eyes, which were childlike and sad.

"Will it be cheerful there?"

"Yes."

"And warm?"

"Yes, and warm, and later on there'll be some tea and Father will come down when he hears Gelfius playing and he'll tell us about Paris and Rome and Della Robbia and so on."

"Oh, Elis!" begged Rassiem, unconsciously clasping his hands. "Let me come with you, my dear; I feel so miser-

able, so rotten. It's just the right sort of evening for getting into trouble. Take me with you and help me a little. My car's there. I can't stand the idea of being alone—"

Gelfius permitted himself one brief, penetrating glance when Rassiem addressed Elis so familiarly; and then it was gone. Berger opened the door of the car. Elis's heart was throbbing. How glorious, it said continuously, how glorious, glorious, glorious— Outside in the foggy street, little Eva Hartwig stood staring after the receding car, and when she slowly turned to go because there was nothing more to see, Dima appeared beside her—a tall, straight shadow in the fog that raised its head and murmured, "Can it be all over—?"

Chapter Twenty-One: A BAD TIME

WHEN GELFIUS HAD FINISHED PLAYING HIS SYMPHONY they all remained silent for a time. Elis, her eyes glistening, could still hear the last powerful notes of the main theme which, after surviving so many battles and adventures, and passing through bitterness and sweetness, had triumphed at last in the crystalline brilliance of E sharp. In Professor Kerckhoff's hand crackled a piece of paper on which he had sketched Elis's exalted face. Rassiem seemed to push a heavy burden away with his shoulders, and said, "Beautiful. By Jove, Gelfius—where on earth do you get it all from?" Elis got up to prepare tea next door in the library. Mr. Punch, her little dog, bounded round her feet.

"Just look at that child," said Professor Kerckhoff. "Just look at what your music has done to her, how exalted she is today. I have never seen her like that, I've never seen her so illumined with inner fire. I should never have thought that this little girl of mine was so sensitive."

Elis returned, a smile of almost painful happiness shining in her eyes. They rested for a moment on Rassiem's

effectively posed portrait on the piano, and then looked shyly at him, so changed now, standing at the window, gazing sadly into the darkness. Next door in the library the kettle was singing gaily, and a standard lamp diffusing a softly shaded light through the room, gleaming here and there on the gold lettering on the back of a book, or the white marble of a bust. *Here you sit,* thought Gelfius, *here you are; William Gelfius, the illegitimate child of an unknown mother; a ne'er-do-well pianist in a brothel and other such lovely places; here you sit, the composer of a symphony and in love with the daintiest, most delicate creature in the world. Unhappily in love—according to the fools who do not know that to love, to be able to love at all, must always be a happiness.*

"Your hands are very brown," said Elis, blushing, as Rassiem stretched out for a cup of tea.

"Where were you this summer? At the seaside?" asked Kerckhoff.

"In the Tyrol," answered Rassiem shortly. Gelfius gazed at the white carnations, which trembled more violently on Elis's dress. "Did you do any walking tours?"

"No, not really. I had to rest my nerves, just rest."

"At last!" said Gelfius. "And about time too! No drinking, eh? No women? No fooling about? That's just what you want, isn't it? Because—" He broke off, terror-stricken, and gazed in reproachful consternation at the dainty little teaspoon in his hand, then at Elis, then at Rassiem, who had to laugh. "I'm sorry I was such a beast," he added softly.

Kerckhoff took him by the shoulder and tried to change the conversation. "My dear Gelfius, you must explain one or two things to me in your symphony. I don't understand music at all, I only feel that something is good; but, as to why it is or the reason for it, I haven't the vaguest notion. For instance, in the second movement; will you play it to

me again?"

Gelfius got up, and suddenly, alarmingly, Elis found herself alone with Rassiem in the library. "Will you have another cup of tea," she ventured timidly.

"No, thank you. May I smoke?"

"Yes, do. Have one of these. I've got some of your particular brand."

"Oh, how thoughtful of you. Thank you."

"It's strange, isn't it?"

"What is, Elis?"

"That—that you should be here with me now. I can—I could touch your hand. It really is here. And yet everything is very strange, you are so strange."

"Because I am on a visit, my first visit. And then I'm seeing our little Elis in a new role, doing the honors of the house. I really ought to address her as *'gnädiges Fräulein,'* " he murmured politely but absently, and his hand once again tried to brush something away from his forehead.

Next door Gelfius was playing the yearning melody of the second movement. Elis stood up and looked at Hannes Rassiem. His eyelids were heavy and red-rimmed, his mouth was tired, and under his chin hung slack, soft wrinkles. Elis felt as though she were going to cry, and she asked very softly, "Are you tired, my dear?" He merely nodded; she knelt down beside him, took his hand, and laid her cheek against its palm. As he caressed her face his mood softened and he turned to her for sympathy. "What has made you so tired and your eyes so sad, darling?"

"I've been waiting, Elis, I've been waiting. Do you know what it means to wait?"

"Yes, I know." But her heart was asking incessantly, *Where have you been all this time?*

"Where have you been all this time?" she whispered.

"I can't talk about that."

Like Tannhäuser? In the Venusberg? she thought childishly, and without realizing it, spoke her thoughts aloud.

"No, Elis, not in the Venusberg. With my wife."

She flinched, pierced by a thrust that brought tears to her eyes.

"She was so ill, Elis, so desperately ill."

"And now? Is she well again?"

"I know nothing about her. Nothing at all."

Next door the second movement drew to a close; it rose exaltedly to its finale in a last lingering variation which was tormented by aching discords. "Give me your hand," whispered Hannes Rassiem. "It does me good." He pulled the little hand toward him and laid it on his brow and eyes. It was very quiet; Elis could feel his shoulders heaving, and her trembling fingers felt tears on them. And while in profound relief she laid her lips on his hair, he whispered faintly, "Little mother, little mother—"

The piano next door was silent. Professor Kerckhoff murmured something, and Gelfius's voice, unnaturally softened, replied. But then the rings of the portiere rattled, light shone across the room, and Gelfius cried, "Rassiem! Herr Kammersänger! It's nearly nine o'clock! Are we going to stay here forever?"

"Yes, forever," answered Rassiem, childishly hiding his face in the shadow, where he furtively rubbed his eyes. Professor Kerckhoff, standing in the doorway with an absent-minded expression on his face, thought, *I ought to have a shot at a young man, bending low, digging in deep shadows—but that is a pictorial composition, not a plastic.* For a moment Gelfius held Elis's hand, a hand that seemed even smaller and more helpless than before.

In the street the fog slunk here and there like a cowed animal. Berger was waiting with the car beneath the light of a miserable lamp. "Well, here we are, it's only nine o'clock. What are we going to do now? Berger, what are

we going to do with our endless evening?" asked Rassiem. Berger opened his mouth expectantly.

"We're going to drive back to Rodaun and are going to sleep!" Gelfius remarked, pushing Rassiem into the car. "And we are going to keep our mouth shut in such a fog!"

"No, no, no. Not to Rodaun, no! Not there, not to those rooms, for heaven's sake!" cried Rassiem, and the threefold 'No' seemed alive with despair and apprehension. He clung to Gelfius. "Don't leave me alone, for goodness' sake don't leave me alone. And not to that house, whatever you do—"

"What then?"

"Anywhere else! Berger! Drive on, anywhere! Somewhere where there are people and where it is cheerful; we want to be cheerful. You must come too, Gelfius; yes, you must. You've made me quite limp with your music, now you've got to help me."

"Limp? Oh!" said Gelfius, hugging his score with grim tenderness. "And now you want to go and drink yourself back to strength?"

"Be quiet, don't talk, Gelfius. I'm in a bad way, Gelfius—I feel rotten—miserable." Gelfius took one look at Rassiem's face, in which the muscles were working extraordinarily, and got into the car without a word. People, houses, lights seemed to dissolve as in water. But the sky above was cold and clear. The car stopped in front of a restaurant. Rassiem crept out of the car, clinging to Gelfius's arm. As for Gelfius, he had as it were surrounded himself with a transparent wall behind which he stood alone with his composition, but in other respects he was ready for anything.

They forced their way through thick cigar smoke to the regular Opera table. Strongly marked faces glanced up at them, glasses were raised, there was a rumble of hearty bass voices. A waiter murmured tempting dishes. The

lyrical baritone told a vulgar joke in Bohemian dialect. At the end of the table, tiny, dressed in crumpled black, sat a journalist, happily scribbling notes in his notebook for the column "Behind the Scenes." A producer, gazing mournfully at the ceiling, said irrevocable things about the Director. Everybody having added a word with relish, the victim was discarded like a corpse. Rassiem emptied his bottle and laughed stupidly. Someone or other was talking about the new production of *Tristan*. Then he got up, grasped Gelfius's arm as though taking him under arrest, and left. It was eleven o'clock. "Black coffee!" commanded Rassiem of Berger, who was freezing outside in the fog.

In the café there were girls, some lounging in corners, who turned eagerly in Rassiem's direction, their faces gleaming pale under their hair, and others whose skin was covered with a blue dusting of make-up. Weedy journalists were conducting weighty but long-winded discussions over the eggs which they were eating from tulip-shaped glasses. Next to them were ordinary city men playing cards. Beneath one skylight sat a poet, holding a string of gaily colored beads in his soft hands; his eyes traveled over the people there sadly, like those of an ailing dog. Rassiem drank brandy. Gelfius talked of tours in the mountains, of broad glaciers, blue, white, and crisply cold like A sharp, but he could tell from Rassiem's eyes and hands that it was useless. Then they played chess. Rassiem made a few pointless moves and pushed the pieces away from him in confusion. Rassiem had drunk four glasses of brandy. A naked woman stared at him with an evil smile from a poster. They paid as the clock pointed to midnight.

Berger gazed searchingly at his master before driving off, and then drove to Arcadia. A lantern was swaying in a crooked passageway and a beaming porter snatched open

a door. Inside everything was white and gold and scarlet. Hungry violins screamed, and a fat creature was bellowing a song across the tables, beating time with forced gaiety with his hands. There was a smell of wine and unclothed women. A piercing noise, a mist of flowers and cigarettes, and laughter that made no pretense at being natural. Rassiem ordered champagne and burst from silence into noisy speech. Heads turned at the sound of his voice, and he was recognized. Flowers were thrown at him. Gelfius clasped his hands firmly round his score and gazed up at the little stage where the musicians were playing. He gazed at the back of the man at the harmonium, a crooked back with shiny seams to its tail coat, and an air of utter resignation in every line; his shoulders were dragging themselves in the rhythm of the street musicians—*'mtata—'mtata—*

"My colleague—" said Gelfius, and with an impetuous movement he thrust his broad pianist's hand across the table at Rassiem. "It is a long time since I was here. Do you remember how you rescued me from here, Rassiem? Yes, I lived here, playing night after night: *'mtata, 'mtata;* and the girls used to bring me the caviar sandwiches which they couldn't eat, and things went badly with me, badly, Rassiem—"

And Rassiem thought, *Are you trying to help me now—you with your bristly chin, and your piano score and your pockets stuffed with books?* And his pupils looked large and flickering in his bright tear-stained eyes.

"But, Rassiem, remember this: one can't give oneself up for lost! One always has oneself, one's innermost self, to fall back on. That's what I want to say; I sat here, and in spite of it this music here was in me." He clutched his music in his outstretched fingers. "To be happy or to suffer all comes to the same thing in the end; it's all right if it helps one's work. One can always fall back on oneself,

can't one?"

A dance started. Spanish girls in crudely colored frocks appeared in the narrow spaces between the tables, and flung themselves about in wild abandon for the benefit of the onlookers. "Tango!" yelled Rassiem. "Bravo! Tango!"

Gelfius continued: "I remember quite clearly how I got to know you. You were as drunk as a pig, you had one of the women on your lap, and you were pouring champagne down her chest and singing—"

"The song of the Grail," murmured Rassiem.

"Yes, it was the song of the Grail; and it was so pure, Rassiem, so true. You cried afterward."

"Look! Look!" Rassiem whispered. "All the people in this room look gray—it's hideous—"

"Tomorrow we'll work at Tristan, Rassiem," said Gelfius.

A dancer leaned across Rassiem's shoulders and reached for his glass. "Will you give me something to drink, darling?" she asked, stroking his face softly with her scented hand. He grasped her arm, pulled her down beside him, and gazed into her face with a wondering curiosity. "Well, what's the matter. You don't recognize me, do you? I haven't forgotten you. You're not the sort that one forgets so easily. Will you give me a drink?"

"Why are you so worried, Fräulein?" Hannes Rassiem asked, and as though in a dream he saw his own reflection bending over a painted face; and he was a fair-haired boy of twenty, in Cophenhagen for the first time.

"Drunk, completely tight!" said the dancer, with a questioning glance at Gelfius, whom she suddenly recognized. "Why—Orchestra! Is it really you? But how smart we've grown! What's the matter with him, what's wrong with our handsome Kammersänger?"

Gelfius looked at Rassiem's wreck of a face and shrugged

his shoulders. "Go away. Leave him alone."

But Rassiem clutched her arm and pulled her closer. "Give, give!" he whispered. "Make me hungry, make me desirous; make me tired so that I don't have to think, so that I can sleep. Sleep—" he said longingly; and then he asked of the dancer's eyes, "Have you a child?"

She jerked back, startled more by his tone than his question. "He's drunk! What does he want of me? What have I done to him?" she screamed, her voice becoming high-pitched and harsh. "Yes, of course I've a child, who hasn't? What have I done to him, what does he want?" She flung her head on the table and burst into hysterical sobbing. "What have I done to him?" she repeated continually.

Rassiem gazed at her. "Bitch!" he said in a loud voice and stood up; his hand hovered uncertainly and knocked the champagne cooler over. Gelfius put his music in safety and steered him through the thick air, which was rich with comments and laughter, to the door. Berger was sitting with crossed legs beside the cloakroom attendant, fast asleep.

"Am I drunk? No," said Rassiem, and his eyes were filled with fear. "I can't get drunk any more. I can't do anything any more—it's Maria's fault. Maria—"

Gelfius closed the car and said to Berger, "Drive to his flat in Vienna. I'll be there at ten o'clock to go through *Tristan.*" Then he went away, his music under his arm, safely ensconced behind his glass wall. The streets were empty and quiet; the fog had lifted. Gelfius glanced upward. The houses seemed to shrink into themselves, and up above in the crystal-black sky hung the everlasting stars.

Chapter Twenty-Two: THE INVISIBLE WOUND

RASSIEM TUMBLED WEARILY INTO BED, and slept for the first time in five days. He fell into sleep as one might fall into

a pond, into a dark, boundless, dreamless, infinite blackness. But when he recovered consciousness again, a damp morning air was blowing in at the window and his eyelashes were moist and his heart felt as light as though he had wept his troubles away during his unconsciousness. The room was gray and had a summer emptiness; the windows stared at him, without curtains, like eyes without lashes. In the neighboring room shrouded chairs huddled round the table looking like little yellow begging monks. And anyone might enter by the half-open door and bring bad tidings.

Rassiem sighed deeply and forced himself to sleep again. He was walking across a field, the field of his dreams that he had known for so long, and he was inexpressibly tired. Black horses came dashing across from the wood, and sharp, steely blue hailstones were falling. They looked like a downpour of needles and they hurt the eyes. There was the sound of a shot, and he thought, *That is the suicide. She's done it.* And then a rainbow spread itself like a dome over the field and an indescribably gentle, lovely warmth enveloped him. He lay with his head pleasantly pillowed in a bed of thyme, and in the distance a woman came striding across the field, a beautiful naked woman who sang, "Farewell, my youth, farewell." He raised his arms and reached out for her and pulled her toward him out of the distance, warm and close and secure. He recognized her limbs and the scent of thyme, and awoke. And he held Dima in his arms, Dima who was lying against his breast, sobbing as though she would never stop. He clasped his hands about her heaving shoulders and lay quiet, still half in his dream, listening with a strangely happy feeling to her sobs. *Are you crying at last, you hard creature, crying over me?* he thought.

"Where have you been all this time? Where have you been?" Dima whispered, when she was able to speak, just

as Elis had asked, "Where have you been all this time?"

"With my wife, Dima; she was ill."

"With her," said Dima, and all tenderness vanished from her lovely face. "You never wrote to me. Why didn't you?"

"Nor you to me, Dima. Why didn't you?"

"I'm not going to run after you," she said and sat up straight. He looked at her and her closeness made him realize overwhelmingly how beautiful she was, beautiful and strong and entrancingly young, her eyes with the trace of tears still gleaming in them, making her seem fresh and adorned. "How good it is to have you here, so good, so marvelous," he whispered, and she could feel the truthfulness of his words, and did not question any more.

"What were you doing all summer, tell me!" he demanded. Immediately she clenched her fists again and said, "There's nothing to tell, nothing."

No, she thought, *I can't tell it: the fear, the deadly indescribable fear of having lost you. Those nights that were like blows from a whip. Jealousy, burning like salt in an open wound. Thoughts that whirled and raged. Pride and despair—pride and despair; no, one can't tell of these things.*

"I've been studying Isolde," she said. "The second and third acts. And waiting for you to come back. I saw you yesterday; you drove past me. I couldn't stand it any longer. I couldn't wait any longer. I had to come to you." She gazed at him and laughed softly. "Your lashes, dearest, your shoulders, your hands. Let me sleep with you," she whispered, exhausted.

"Your hair is damp, and your clothes—" he said with strange remoteness, and a gap widened between them.

"It is raining and I've been waiting outside the house for a long time, for ages." And then with a sudden gesture: "You must kiss me—"

I am young, he thought, as her kisses took possession of his person and his blood, young, young. But in the next instant, frighteningly, it seemed to him that he was a spectator at his own embrace. For the first time in his life Hannes Rassiem felt that he was behaving badly to his wife. And he let go of Dima.

"You poor child," he said, overcome by a strange pity, taking her face tenderly in his hands. "Poor child, forgive me."

She did not understand him; instead, quietly effacing all the pain of the summer, she replied, "Then everything is all right, all is well."

These words, so recently uttered by another, floated like a ghost through the room, and the tenderness in Rassiem's hands was shattered.

The clock in the music-room delicately struck the hour. "I must get up," he said, becoming restless and excited. "Gelfius is coming at ten to work at *Tristan.*"

"Tristan!"

Rassiem looked at her sharply; her tone was urgent and like a request. "You—you can stay here; you can practice the second act with us. Meanwhile go and get yourself into voice. How does that suit you?"

Quickly Dima took his hand and kissed it; there was a mixture of love, a student's humility, and pride in the gesture, which filled him with warmth. "My Isolde," he said, and was furious because the words sounded so theatrical.

Half an hour later Gelfius appeared in the music-room, threw one brief glance at Dima, and remarked as casually as possible, "It's raining cats and dogs, I feel like Basilio in the *Barbiere.*" He accompanied his remark by shaking his hat and umbrella so that the drops showered about him.

"Look here, old chap," Rassiem begged impatiently.

"Just to please me, don't always bring all your belongings with you when you come into a room. Your manners are hopeless." Unreasonably cast down and ashamed, Gelfius took his umbrella outside. To reassure himself he plunged his left hand in his pocket, where he could feel a volume of Lessing's prose and a slim volume of Brentano.

When he returned, Dima was standing at the piano, her body tense as a bow. "Fräulein Dimatter is going to practice with us; we'll try the second act," said Rassiem, throwing his cigarette away. "I'm—hm—I'm not in very good voice, it's so early and I'm tired, I'll just indicate the part—" He made his new aimless gesture, passing his hand across his forehead. Dima's eyes, quick and searching, challenged Rassiem's glance, which fell and turned away. It was only the matter of a second, but in this second they stood opposed to one another like antagonists. Then Gelfius bent over the keys and Isolde's veil waved its signal.

Rassiem plunged his hand in his trouser pocket and started to indicate softly: "Two—one—two—Iso—olde." But Dima's voice burst upon him like a flame: "Tristan! Beloved!" It seemed to him as though he had stepped out of a cellar-cold, dark hall into the scorching, glaring heat of summer; and suddenly something gave way within him, he breathed deeply and let himself be carried away, himself and his voice, and they soared into the eternal love duet as though on wings.

An hour later they stopped. "Well!" said Gelfius, blinking at Rassiem, "I thought you'd lost your voice? Personally, I don't think that was so bad."

"Well—!" drawled Rassiem. He was lying on the sofa looking noticeably pale. His fair hair clung damply to his forehead. "Well—" he repeated uncertainly, gazing thoughtfully at his hands.

Gelfius started playing *"Traurige Weise."* "Shall we do a piece of the last act now? Are you in the mood?"

"No, thanks, I've had enough. But the girl—I should like to hear the finale, Fräulein Dimatter, if you please. Well, off we go."

Dima closed her eyes, and immediately the familiar vision of Isolde was before her. This was how she must walk, stretch her hands thus into the empty air, thus stare past the beloved corpse into infinity. Thus she must die.

"Well, I'm damned!" said Gelfius, long after she had finished. Rassiem stared at her and murmured, "Fine; it was fine." She avoided his glance as though she were running through a flaming passage, and walking up to the mirror she smiled shyly and strangely moved at her reflection. The lid of the piano was slammed down noisily, cutting the silence in two.

"The sun's shining; the rain has stopped; if I were you, Rassiem, I'd get my car and get out into the freshly washed air. You were in a bad way yesterday, and tomorrow you've got to sing Eleazar. For heaven's sake get out of the town, otherwise everything will go wrong." Gelfius fetched his umbrella and coat, and repeated urgently, "Tomorrow there's Eleazar, don't forget!" and disappeared, his hair in wild disarray. Dima stood lost in thought at the window.

"Yes, the sun is shining again," she said, but her thoughts were far away.

"You've learned a lot this summer, an incredible amount, girl."

"A lot yes, but not enough. I can't get the first act right; it won't come. I know it technically, musically, of course. But I just can't get it; it seems as though I'm up against a wall. And even you can't help me there, Mr. Teacher—" She broke off, blushing quickly, and a new thought came to her. "What's to happen now? What about lessons? In school?"

"What's to happen? What's to happen?" he repeated, and his hand was passed aimlessly across his forehead.

"Oh, never mind that for the moment. Everything's all right today; you've given me a good day today. We'll drive out to Semmering. The air is light and fresh there from the mountains. I breathe so heavily, sometimes."

Dima's fingers made a movement as though they were trying to grasp something, something intangible; and once again her fingers grasped a void.

Berger was ordered to get the car quickly out of the garage. "Shut the house here, and be ready for me in Rodaun!" Rassiem commanded. Berger doubled himself in two in his obeisance, and they set off through air that was damp and golden with sun, beneath a sky in which the clouds hung like ragged banners. Rassiem was at the wheel and kept his eye on the road, which swept swiftly past him. Dima, sitting beside him, gazed expectantly at his face, of which she could only see the profile with its fair lock of hair over the broad brow, and a wrinkle which began at his eye and ran down to his mouth, and those lips that were so exciting, so practiced in the arts of expression. *That is truly you, darling,* she thought. She compared this face with the face she had seen so often in her dreams, wild, tender, passionate, always in love, always in love. She said, "Look at that wood, isn't it lovely?" And: "There's a little church over there." And: "The car's running well." But her thoughts continued incessantly: *Come nearer, darling; be yourself again, so that I can be conscious of you, yourself. There is an aching void between us. I never imagined that it would be as miserable as this, so endlessly miserable.* And she laughed noisily as she pointed at the morning landscape and lied desperately. "It's glorious today, isn't it? You and I together. I'm so fond of you, and so happy."

Hannes Rassiem put his free arm round her and they drove through the countryside close beside each other, as they had before. Then they sat on the terrace at Sem-

mering, their hands clasped, as before. They spoke lovingly, as before. They were like marionettes playing a well-known piece, and every tenderness seemed to be suspended on wires in the air. Autumn was creeping through the woods like a bent old man searching for the last flower to take away with him. As the car slid along in the twilight toward the valley, Dima felt as though she were slowly bleeding to death from an invisible wound.

"What's the matter, Dima? You look so white. You're growing paler every minute. Don't you feel well? Darling, I am so fond of you." That word again. He folded her in his coat, stroked her hair. And for one minute everything was all right again.

"It's nothing, Hannes. Probably only nonsense, anyway. I've been waiting such a long time, thinking all the while that when I saw you again it would be so wonderful, so unbelievably wonderful. And now everything just seems to fall short of it. I can't realize it, I can't get at you. Your heart—yes, it is beating. It is all nonsense, isn't it, dearest?"

He kissed her playfully, as one kisses a child. "You dear stupid," he said, and the car drove on through the evening down into the valley. Squeezed in his arms, Dima gazed with growing melancholy at the mists which had begun to billow across the meadows in shapeless waves and seemed to breathe like a sea. *How lost you are,* cried her heart. Suddenly Isolde was before her, Isolde on the boat, encompassed by dull, bitter pain, wringing her hands, choking in a turmoil of thoughts: loving, hoping, proud, and despairing.

There was a loud report. Rassiem swore. The car swerved out of control, and bumped into something. Dima was thrown heavily against the side. "Well," said Rassiem. "We're in a nice mess! A burst tire. It's this vile road. And we've got no spare wheel. A pretty kettle of fish!"

"Where are we?" asked Dima, staring dazedly at the

scattered lights which twinkled about the car.

"It's the very devil! What on earth are we going to do? We're in Payerbach; you've been asleep, child, eh? And now it's starting to pour with rain. Oh, God!" Dima crept out of the car and laughed with relief. Rassiem was poking at the burst tire in such comic dismay. A prodigious, increasing flood of water poured from the heavens, and soon road, car, and clothes were gleaming wet. Beyond the light of the small lanterns a bridge vaulted into the darkness and houses were dimly visible pushing their way crookedly uphill. Beneath the shelter of the old chestnut trees on the other side of the road there were a few onlookers. A few tables stood behind the railing of an inn and two bar attendants dashed out with white aprons thrown over their heads to rescue the red-checked tablecloths and beer mats from the downpour. Rassiem cursed in several languages and Dima laughed and laughed, glad of the diversion. At last a porter appeared from the inn to offer advice. "The Automobile Club has a station at Zwirsinger's; the boy could run along and tell them. In the meantime perhaps the lady and gentleman would go into the restaurant. There's a concert too."

"All right, all right. For heaven's sake, child, go inside; it's so cold and wet. Zwirsinger had better come and have a look at things. If the worst comes to the worst, we may have to spend the night here."

Suddenly the evening had turned into a harmlessly pleasant one. The inn blinked at the wet garden with its lighted windows, and humming ventilators emitted steaming air which wreathed around the lamp over the entrance. There were posters on the door announcing a smoking-concert with first-class artistes. It was warm and noisy and crowded in the hall. Scattered among the worthy inhabitants of the village of Payerbach and Reichenau were the last holiday visitors, dressed in exaggerated coun-

try clothes. Smoke hung in thick clouds about the ceiling. Dima and Rassiem pushed their way through an astonished silence right up to the front by the tiny stage. There was still room here. A notice announced, *Orchestra Stalls,* and wine glasses were set out hopefully. Rassiem looked anxiously at his wet coat, then felt his throat and chest and said, "If only I'm not hoarse·tomorrow! If only I can shake this off successfully. I hope to goodness I'm not hoarse tomorrow!" He breathed deeply through his nose, pressed his diaphragm, and tried a few notes: "Mi-Mi-Mi; Mo-Mo: Mi." It was all right. He said, "My feet are cold, are yours?" and ordered mulled wine. A fat man stood on the stage blowing with all his might into a cornet and producing an emotional tremolo. He achieved his purpose, for when he left the stage, looking somewhat purple, there was much clapping and stamping.

Dima, her thoughts strangely constrained and confused, gazed with an absent-minded smile at the walls, the floating threads of smoke, the hazy faces about her, and drank her wine and held Rassiem's hand under the table.

It made him feel uncomfortable, but it made her feel wonderfully happy to have her fingers clasped in his. Suddenly she felt her hand dropped and thrust away, and heard Rassiem exclaim, "Well, I'm blessed!" At the same moment the piano lifted its thin voice and strove to make itself heard above the general confusion. Dima looked up, and blushed slowly.

For the stage was occupied by Fräulein Lukas. The fact that she should be singing here, her general appearance, and her mannerisms made Dima feel strangely ashamed.

Fräulein Lukas had grown fatter, a little too fat, for her flesh looked unhealthy and she was extremely décolleté. Her dress was unnecessarily elegant and expensive, hung with lace, crumpled, limp and gray as though it had been in too many smoky rooms; it was out of date and had most

assuredly been purchased secondhand. Her hair was blonder than ever, almost red, and was elaborately dressed in curls. Fräulein Lukas smiled round the room with an inviting display of teeth, clasped her hands that were covered with dirty white kid gloves, and began a languishing song.

"Just look what's become of her," Dima murmured.

Rassiem played nervously with a piece of bread. "Her voice is finished!" he whispered. "Her middle register is quite broken. Such a waste of wonderful material! Completely ruined!"

"How sad!" said Dima, strangely moved by the word. "How sad that sounds: broken!"

"Can't you hear it? The break begins at F, there's a big gap there—no middle register—and her high notes were never very grand. There we are!" Rassiem was quite right. Fräulein Lukas contracted her throat muscles, puffed herself up, and let out a very high, very loud, very shrill note. The audience was delighted and full of appreciation. Fräulein Lukas expressed her thanks with eyes, lips, and a flourish of her exposed bosom, and the piano began the next song. Almost immediately a strangely unguarded expression crossed her face, the song became uncertain, and only recovered itself with difficulty. Fräulein Lukas had seen the two of them down below; her eyes had taken in Rassiem, and then Dima, on whom they had fixed like gimlets. Dima smiled shyly and clapped; Rassiem wriggled backward and forward in discomfort. "I can't stand any more," he said, as Fräulein Lukas started Elisabeth's aria. "I simply can't bear it. I'll go and have a look at the car." And he left the hall on tiptoe followed by reproachful shakings of the head in the auditorium.

Fräulein Lukas's expression altered painfully. She took her eyes off Dima and followed Rassiem through the crowd, past the buffet, along the back wall, until the red

curtain over the exit fell behind him. And then she dropped her hands to the sides of her crumpled frock with such a gesture of despair that Dima was startled. The aria collapsed, and in the applause which followed, Fräulein Lukas walked straight up to Dima's table. "Why did he go?" she asked, without exchange of greetings.

"He had to look at the car," said Dima and tried to shake hands with her.

"Oh, the car. I was afraid that he was not pleased, and I made such an effort. Stupid really, as though I were still a student at the Conservatoire!"

"It was very nice," ventured Dima awkwardly.

"What? Yes, my top notes are good now, aren't they? Oh, yes, one can get along quite well without the Conservatoire. Perhaps you all think I'm having a bad time? Far from it, my dears! I'm very happy, very: successes, flowers, elegant clothes! Life isn't half bad in Wiener-Neustadt. And now I'm probably going to Troppau. A friend of mine has just been transferred there, an engineer, such a nice fellow. He's got influence, I can assure you! He's going to get me there."

"That's fine," said Dima encouragingly. Fräulein Lukas gazed absently before her. People at the tables round about had stopped eating and drinking and were staring at the two girls. "So he's outside tinkering with the car? Yes, of course, I know that's his hobby—I ought to know. And now it's your turn to go motoring? Well, just you be careful that you don't come a cropper like I did. One slides downhill easily enough, Fräulein Dimatter; but to work your way up again—that's a very different matter! The things I've been through I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. And it all began with a little motoring—a little motoring, a little wine, living a little more elegantly, a little kissing, a little love-making. Ah me!"

"I don't know—it shouldn't—dear Fräulein—" Dima

stammered and her lips were parched.

"Yes, that's how it happens; and later on you get kicked out like a dog," said Fräulein Lukas, and her face and voice become more and more dejected. "Afterward, you find you can't exist without that little bit extra, and you neglect yourself; no voice, no engagements. That's all you get out of first love!"

"I don't know—I must go now—" said Dima, hurt, and not realizing how pale she had turned.

"That's all right, don't let me detain you! Enjoy yourself! And kindest regards to the Herr Kammersänger!"

Rassiem was standing under the lamp at the hotel door, doling out tips, and the car was waiting behind a streaky veil of rain. Despite her burning cheeks, Dima was shivering. "Now let's get home as quickly as possible. I've sneezed twice already. If only all goes well. If only I'm not hoarse in the morning—Mi-Mi-Mi—" said Rassiem, and off they went. Dima could see by the light of the car lamps that there was a deep frown on his forehead, and she preserved an anxious silence. The clouds hung low and heavy, and the rain and wind blew in cold gusts. The lights played on puddles and wet sand. "A lovely outing, enchanting!" Rassiem grumbled. "And this perishing cold!"

Dima pressed against him and breathed on his shoulder as though she were trying to thaw a frozen window; and her warmth really did seem to hearten him a little. "Don't you worry, child!" he said and squeezed her closer. "We are making good going. We'll be in Rodaun in an hour, and then it'll be nice."

"Yes, dearest. But I've got to get back to Vienna; I've got to get home. What on earth would Sophie think if I stayed out all night. There'd be a fearful shindy. You'll have to take me back to Vienna—please—"

"Don't be ridiculous," he said angrily. "How on earth can I take you to Vienna? What are you thinking of? You'll

stay in Rodaun, and that's that! This everlasting ridiculous nonsense about your family!"

"But Sophie—"

"Sophie—rubbish! I'll soon smooth her down. One isn't inconsolable about such matters in the Ballet."

They drove on thus in the thick darkness with only the white beam of the car lights before them. Trees marched by one by one like people into the darkness. It was warmer here. Then they reached the open plain spread out like a blackboard, swept by icy winds, with its poplars bending beneath the gusts. Rassiem sneezed twice, and after that they drove home at a furious pace.

Berger, whom they found asleep in the hall, received so many instructions during the first few minutes that he began running round in circles, rolling upstairs like a film comedian and producing a whole cataract of noises. "A boiling hot bath! Brandy first! Air a pair of pajamas! My slippers! Herb tea! Aspirin! A hot-water bottle in the bed! Turn the heating on! In the guest room, too!" Rassiem, his damp fair hair on end, rushed up and down the hall. He sang vocals in half-voice and tapped his throat and chest, speaking intermittently to Dima, who was cowering, cold and wet, by the stove. "You must forgive me, but my voice is the most important thing at the moment—Ah-Ah-Ah—I'll try and cure it with a sudorific—Mi-Mi-Mi—it's up there—Berger. I'll have a nasal douche— Are you cold, child? If I cancel tomorrow my dear colleague will step in. He's had his eyes on Eleazar for a long time—these young people want to have everything at once—*Recha als Gott Dich einst—G-o-o-t*: you see? D'you hear? That's where the trouble is—*G-o-o-t*: *Dich einst zur Tochter mir gegeben—*"

"Your bath is ready, sir," announced Berger, rolling downstairs. "And afterward we'll go to bed and sweat it out."

"All right, all right. Bring me the herb tea in bed! Good night, child, don't be cross with me! My voice comes first. Oh! what cold lips you've got! Go to bed quickly. Good night."

"We're sleeping in the guest chamber," said Berger, planting himself on his crooked legs before Dima. "Everything has been warmed."

"Thanks; yes, that's all right. I believe I've got a bit of a temperature too. I feel so peculiar, and so shivery." Her teeth were chattering noisily, but she felt it was her nerves that were causing this—they were like a painfully tight net about her head. It was only after she was in bed that the shaking and shivering stopped, and she lay awake for a long time, staring at the red-shaded lamp and listening to the ebbing sounds of the house. That was Berger, running about performing his duties; then Rassiem shouted for a compress from across the way; water ran into the bath and was succeeded by a gurgling noise. Later on a teaspoon clattered. Berger crept about on tiptoe. The electric light was turned off with a click. The clock in the hall raised its deep voice. Then only the rain whispered, and the trees sang sleepily in the wind.

Everything will be different tomorrow, she thought, as she fell asleep with clenched fists.

She awoke fresh and bright and with the sensation that something was just slipping out of her hands, something tremendously sweet and enchanting. A dream? A wish? It was cool in her room; she rubbed her feet against the cool smoothness of the floor, and she gazed into the garden. The sky stretched a tense blue above the slightly yellow foliage of the trees; the sun had a shy smile; the gravel on the paths was damp and dark yellow from the rain in the night. The asters blooming in the borders made a blaze of color. As she came out of the bathroom, Berger crept up in carpet slippers and gestured. "Sch—sh—sh—we're still asleep; we

mustn't be wakened whatever happens. We've been quite mad for the past few days and liable to throw boots at people's heads for a mere nothing. And if we're hoarse into the bargain—!"

"That's all right," said Dima haughtily. She opened his door hesitatingly and carefully and crept up to Rassiem's bed. She looked at him: the shadow of his lashes, his fair hair, his powerful chest, his long, well-bred hands lying on the coverlet and twitching sometimes in his sleep. She bent over him and saw also the two new, tired, sad wrinkles round his mouth. A rush of feeling brought tears to her eyes, and as she softly kissed his hand she felt the birth of a new, bigger, and more tender love. He reached for her in his dream and whispered, "Darling," and fell asleep again like a child.

Dima went down into the garden with an absorbed smile. Down below Berger was picking asters for the breakfast table. "Aren't there any more roses?"

"Only a few yellow ones by the fountain; they're not particularly good," and as Dima turned in that direction: "But they are not to be picked; they are to be left, whatever happens; the master said so."

For me! thought Dima still smiling. There was a ring indoors. Berger went in and Dima's heart began to beat more quickly. *Yesterday was a bad day, but today everything will be all right. I love you so,* said her heart, and there seemed to be a blossoming within it, filling it with warmth. *What will Sophie say?* thought Dima. *Oh, nonsense, it's all nonsense, only one thing matters—*

The little door in the white garden fence clicked open and shut. A lady who must have known the secret mechanism of the lock came in from the street. She wore a plain, green frock, tailor-made and chic. Beneath the brim of her hat gleamed beautiful shadowed eyes and a wide, handsomely curved mouth. She walked down the path

with a peculiar grace, raised her strikingly small hand in its pale gray glove, and asked softly, very politely and not without embarrassment, "Excuse me—good morning—excuse me—is my husband—is Herr Rassiem at home? Do you think I shall be disturbing him?"

"Yes. No. I think—" Dima whispered hoarsely.

The lady smiled a shy and friendly smile, and said again, "Forgive me, good morning," and walked up the three steps of the veranda into the house.

Dima stood beside the bush of yellow roses, gazing after her. A little later she noticed that her hand was bleeding, because she had been grasping a branch covered with thorns, but she had felt no pain.

After an immeasurable length of time a grotesque doll rolled into the garden—a garden in which the trees seemed to have turned a mauve color, and seemed to be crawling backward and forward like animals. It seemed to be Berger, who fetched the car from the garage.

Later on Rassiem appeared and helped his wife down the veranda steps. His forehead was pale and damp; his eyes rejoiced, young and blue and shining with the light that is like nothing else on earth. He wore a smile that Dima did not know, but she knew that the hand that was clasping that tiny hand was trembling with joy. He walked past Dima without seeing her. The lady smiled her shy kindly smile at her as though in secret understanding.

He walked past without seeing her.

And only in her dreams had Dima experienced the indescribably tender care with which Hannes Rassiem lifted his wife into the car.

Chapter Twenty-Three: WHO LOVES MOST, LOSES

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON on a day in October. Elis had sung on into the twilight, and now it was quite dark. She rested

her hot, aching head against the window. Her throat was burning. Outside the trees were strangely silent. In the stillness the rattle of mortar could be heard in the walls, and Father's steps wandering restlessly about in the studio above. *Oh, God! how tired I am,* thought Elis, and: *I ought to be doing my harmony lessons for Gelfius.*

The little lamp on the writing-desk shed a meager light; there lay the music book, with its dead straight, unattractive lines, that looked like hopeless suburban streets. There stood those exercises in C sharp, in the middle of the street, leaning slightly forward, looking like an old-fashioned gentleman with long legs and a ridiculously short body, his little morning coat drab and dull. But his colleague in F sharp had one of brownish-mauve velvet, and if one turned it into the minor, the little man hung his head so sadly that it seemed as though he were crying. But already Elis had had enough of it again. She allowed her thoughts to wander, and with a secret smile pulled out a piece of paper, which she read with a tingling and half-ashamed pleasure: for Elis had just recently written a poem, a strangely helpless and naked thing that stumbled and hesitated, and that she loved with passionate tenderness. It was such a relief to rid oneself of tormenting things in words.

She read:

Meine Nächte sind so eigen,
Seit du mich hast geküsst.
Ich darf es niemand zeigen,
Und du musst's auch verschweigen,
Wie's mit mir ist.

Am Bett liegt schwerer Mondenschein,
Ich habe die Zähne zusammengebissen,
Und in die Arme nehm' ich mein Kissen;
Ganz fest; so schlaf' ich ein.

Aber gestern hab' ich auch geweint;
Denn, wenn der Morgen ins Fenster scheint,
Dann ist er grau und voll von Scham,
Weil all dies in mein Träumen kam—

The end was lacking, and Elis could not find one. She stared at the lamp for a while and then wrote above it: *Eighteen years old.*

Steps approached, the door was flung open, and Dima appeared. She took two hurried, uncertain steps, stumbled, and sank down on the sofa, sobbing with strange animal noises. She thrust her fist between her teeth, bit it, and continued to sob. Her face was ashen gray and her eyes red and swollen. She wore no hat.

"Dima, for heaven's sake, whatever's the matter?" asked Elis weakly, feeling faint and beginning to cry herself. She slid down beside Dima on the floor, took the heaving girl in her arms, and uttered meaningless words in her endeavor to comfort her. It was dreadful to hear Dima sobbing.

Then she grasped a few words, which recurred like a scream.

"Finished, all finished, everything's finished!"

"What is finished, darling? Calm yourself; there, there—tell me about it. What is finished?"

"Everything, just everything. Between Rassiem and me. It's all finished!"

"Between—?" asked Elis slowly. Suddenly she understood, and her hands and lips were frozen stiff. Dima sat up, thrusting her fingers into her mouth as though to stifle her sobs in her throat. She succeeded. She drew a deep breath, and then she poured out everything.

"Finished. Finished. Do you understand? No, nobody could understand it. It's finished. I can just go and shoot myself; but I'll shoot him first, I swear it. Love; this love—you don't know what love is. And suddenly it's all over.

Can it be possible? It can't be. I may go, I can die. I've been given the sack. Me. What am I? I've cheapened myself so, I've begged, kissed his hands, and begged him to let me stay with him. I was ready to be anything he liked, his mistress, his servant, anything, if only I could be with him. But no, no. I was chased away like a dog. I can just go and shoot myself now. But I'll get him too, the beast, the cur, the cad. He's going back to his wife—do you hear that? He's going back to her, and she's going to have a child—that beast has given her a child; he lived with her this summer. This summer," she stammered, and began to sob afresh. "Elis, you don't know what this summer was like. Endless, endless love. And he goes from me to her, and gives her a child."

"This summer—?" murmured Elis chokingly. "Whatever are you talking about?"

"I'm not mincing matters, am I? No, I'm past being squeamish, I can assure you. I've been chucked in the dirt, in the street; anybody can have me, anybody. What's left of me? The lower I fall the better; it almost makes things easier. Oh, Elis— Oh, Elis," she said, suddenly very quiet. "Just think what I was like only a year ago: so proud, so pure—nothing but hard work and dreams. He didn't win me easily, not easily, believe me. How I resisted him, and myself! and then, when I couldn't hold out any longer, how I gave myself! Completely, utterly. Now there's nothing left of me, just emptiness, soiled emptiness. I can't sing. I'm sick of everything. My future is finished. There's nothing left. It's finished.

"It happened three weeks ago. I've been running about like a lunatic. I don't know what I'm doing. Everything I do is dirty, false. I can't believe it's me! I've been to him every day, begging. But not at first. At first I screamed at him; I was so hurt and infuriated, I could not believe it was true. He belongs to me, me; I love him, adore him,

how can it be true? I didn't love him, didn't love him enough, until it was too late. It wasn't until then that I learned what it means: to love. Then I fell more and more. All night I've stood outside his house. Oh, those nights, those nights!

"I stood there staring at the brightly lit window, that bright window with the orange-yellow curtains; shadows pass over it and I stand there staring, knowing only too well what is happening behind those curtains. Then the light goes out in that window— Oh," she said thoughtfully, "I can play Ortrud now; I know what it means to be without hope and to hang about waiting in the darkness, eaten up with jealousy, while people inside are enjoying themselves. If only I hadn't got to love him," she whispered, and she burst into floods of tears. "I can't shake myself free, that's the worst part of all, that is the ghastly part. I'm near him, day and night, in the street, in the theater, everywhere, and I have pleaded with him to let me stay with him. I won't give him up. I can't give him up. How can I? He's so much part of me, he's so completely in my blood that you would have to cut my veins open before I could give him up. In the end he had me thrown out by the office, me. What on earth has become of me? I was so pure and proud, more than most. But he had to have me, he had no mercy. And then when everything was lovely, when we loved each other passionately, he could go and leave me and go to his wife, and have a child by her—

"Oh, Elis, to think that it should be so impossible to find out what another person is like, what he thinks; to think that one must be so miserably alone, so shut up in oneself. You lie in his arms, you kiss him, and he is deceiving you in his thoughts. You think you are in heaven, and the whole time you're lying in the mire."

"Yes," said Elis unexpectedly, and this was the only word she uttered.

Dima brought her face close to Elis's eyes, shrank away, and it was as though she awakened. "What are you looking at? Why are you staring like that?" she asked uncertainly. "Have I shocked you? I had to get it off my chest, I had to tell somebody about it. I feel better now. If only there were no nights; everything comes back to me at night, everything."

They stood up. Elis leaned against the wall and stared at the white apparition that was reflected in the mirror, with deep hollows instead of eyes, that was like a corpse, and yet seemed to be herself. She collapsed with a short, sharp cry, and slid unconscious to the floor. Dima screamed, raised her fists to her mouth, then dropped them; she felt as though she were looking into a blinding light, and she whispered, with a troubled smile, "You? You too?" and ran away as though she were pursued.

The floor trembled from the force with which she slammed the door behind her; and at the same moment the hammer in the studio up above began to resound, and Elis recovered consciousness. She stared, the sound of the hammer seemed like a tiny, mad, green dwarf, who was hiding in the shadows, and speaking to her: "Don't think—don't think—" It wasn't a dwarf. It was the diminished seventh chord in C sharp minor, bright green, and hump-backed, that was dancing incessantly and horribly in the shadows.

Elis dragged herself to the writing-desk, filled the morphia syringe with shaking hands, and plunged it deep into the blueish skin.

Chapter Twenty-Four: THE GREAT EXPERIENCE

AT THE OPERA they were giving the first performance of the new production of *Tristan and Isolde*. Fräulein Sophie Dimatter was not working this evening, and Herr

Edlinger had managed to get the evening off. As for Frau Gusti Edlinger, her condition was such that she would most certainly require an even lengthier holiday from the duties of the theater. They had had a meal of roast kidneys and dumplings, and were feeling satisfied and content, if perhaps a little depressed because of the absence of Dima. There was a nice warm comfortable smell of onions and Herr Edlinger's cigar.

"A nice hot evening meal," he said. "There's nothing to beat a nice hot evening meal! Now the only thing lacking is a nice little morsel of cheese and a little glass of wine."

"What d'you want cheese for?" asked Frau Edlinger, destroying his dreams. "You're not a millionaire, my man!" She sat by the smoking lamp, crocheting hurriedly at a small woolen article. She was beginning to get a double chin and to look like Fräulein Sophie.

"Binders, Gusti, binders are what you ought to make first of all," said the latter, leaning eagerly across the table. "You must do it; that's why you've all got such lovely figures, because I always kept you well swaddled—"

"Get on with you, binders! D'you hear that, Edward? Binders, indeed! They're unhygienic. No one uses things like that nowadays. My child shan't have any binders, and that's that."

Fräulein Sophie became unduly angry, for this squabble had been going on for weeks. "Oh, well, if you think you know more about having children than I do! The idea! Whatever you do, don't take any advice from people with experience. You know more than all of them! You're wiser than all of them. And in the end something like this happens." Her earrings jingled.

Frau Edlinger leaned forward and asked secretively, "Where's she gone to now? What? Where did you say?"

"How should I know? I don't care any more. The slut,

the vulgar hussy! If only one knew where she gets it from! Holy Mother—!"

"But one can't help feeling sorry for her, all the same; look at the way she's wandered about during the past month! She's been like a lunatic! And that Rassiem! She's not the only one he's seduced. He's had princesses and what not, believe me!"

"That's what I say—he seduced her; seduced an innocent girl, an innocent child. Believe me, my lad, if that were to come before the law, you'd be done for, I can tell you, you'd be completely done for. But she's a slut all the same, the stupid girl! What did she do it for? She could have had a count or a baron or a prince. But, no, she goes and throws herself away on that voiceless old brute!"

Herr Edlinger murmured something soothing, but this infuriated Fräulein Sophie all the more. "An old brute with no voice, I said, and I mean it!" she screamed, thumping on the table. "He's old, and he sings worse every time! And she goes and gets mixed up with a fellow like that; my beautiful, innocent child. And whose fault is it? Gusti's!—There, now you know!"

"Mine? How on earth do you make that out? That's going a bit too far!"

"Yes, yours! Who shielded her during all that secret business this summer?"

"Because she said all along that he was going to marry her, for certain; how could one stand in her way then? It's happened before now that a person has made her career that way, hasn't it? And besides, my dear Sophie, I didn't go to see my girl friend in Hungary, if you follow me. Not me. I didn't go driving about in a carriage, not me. To blame me for it all just about takes the biscuit. Heavens!—what on earth's the matter with her now?"

Fräulein Sophie laid both her arms on the table, in the middle of all the supper remains, threw her head on the

tablecloth, and began to cry so miserably and in such childlike abandon that tears welled in the eyes of soft-hearted Herr Edlinger. In his embarrassment he shook an empty beer bottle and said, "There isn't even any more beer," and at the same moment he gave his wife a reproachful and encouraging nudge in the direction of Fräulein Sophie.

"No, no, I didn't mean it, I didn't mean to be spiteful. Come on—Sophie, do stop—it's awful to listen to."

Slowly a few intelligible words emerged through her tears. "I'm so vexed—I feel so sorry for her—I'm so vexed!" she sobbed and the bright tears ran down her cheeks to her lips, where she licked them away. A door shut outside; Fräulein Sophie blew her nose and pulled herself together. Frau Edlinger said, "Ssh!" and picked up her crochet; Herr Edlinger puffed fiercely at his cigar. Dima entered the room.

Her hands hung limply by her sides, a tired but passionate smile played around her mouth, there were deep red lines under her eyes, and her face looked as though it were reflecting a flame. She walked straight across the room, without a glance, as though she were walking in her sleep, to her own room.

"Her Ladyship!" whispered Frau Edlinger. "She can't even say good evening."

"Where have you been all this time?" asked Fräulein Sophie sternly.

"At the Opera, at *Tristan,*" said Dima, gazing blindly about her.

That was the last straw. "What? Do my ears deceive me?" screamed Fräulein Sophie, relapsing in her excitement into high German. "At the opera? At *Tristan?* With that scoundrel singing? Haven't you any pride at all, you slut, you? Are you determined to come to a bad end?"

Dima smiled enigmatically and without a word closed

the door behind her. It was cool and dark in her room. When she lit the light she saw that her hands were trembling. She was conscious too of a thawing in her heart and an infinite sensation of relief. She felt that she had never heard any music before this evening, had never known what the theater could mean; never—until she had seen this performance of *Tristan,* beginning with its oppressive fears and pains, and passing through the deep purple beatitude of its second act, to the sublime sacrifice and profound relief of the lilac-hued last scene. Was it possible that the theater could make one forget oneself so completely and come away from it, and lie down like this, relieved of everything; almost everything?

She lay, gazing before her with burning eyes. The events of the evening ran once more through her mind and her frozen heart throbbed. She wept and whispered to her pillow, "Is that the theater? If so, I'll start singing again tomorrow."

When it was very late, Fräulein Sophie appeared in her nightdress by Dima's bed and said, "Now you're crying, of course; now you're crying all night—that's only to be expected. But stop it now; I can't bear to listen to it any more." Dima did not reply, but her closed eyelids quivered painfully, and quiet tears trembled through her lashes, giving her face such an unwonted expression of gentleness that Fräulein Sophie was overcome by a rush of feeling and sat down on the edge of the bed and pushed the dark, tear-stained curls from Dima's forehead. "Come, dear, don't take it so to heart; that good for nothing! Believe me, they're all good for nothing, they're all the same! And one never gets the first one, anyway. You find out as time goes by that one man is much the same as another. It's a pity to waste any tears over a thing like that, believe me; I know all about it. But he's got to pay, he's got to pay. I've written to him. He earns enough and he owes it to

you. He must give you some capital and we'll buy you some clothes; he's got to pay you a decent sum!"

She saw Dima's face white and angry, with the broad teeth showing, come closer to her, and her hands lying on the coverlet like animals crouching to spring. Uncontrollably Dima began to scream, "Get out! Get out, or I'll hit you, hit you—"

I only did it for the best, said Fräulein Sophie; but she did not say it aloud, she only thought it as she watched her unaccountable child give way to another torrent of grief, which rent and shook her, and made her scream and bite her fists. Then Dima grew quieter, quieter, and buried her head in her arms, and whimpered, "Mother—" There was such bitter yearning in her voice that only then did Fräulein Sophie realize the distance that separated her from this cry. Creeping into her room like a little, cowering animal, she knelt before her blue and white porcelain Madonna, and prayed to her. Her nightdress hung over her round, rather slack breasts, which were shaken with sighs; her hair, that had been done up in a grotesque plait for the night, became that of a little old woman. "Holy Mary, Mother of God, blessed be thou, and blessed be the fruit of thy body; help my child, help my poor child, holy Mary, holy forevermore—"

Dima had fallen into a doze that brought Isolde back to her—the ship, Tristan: not Rassiem, but Tristan. But when she awoke the day seemed to be brighter and clearer than any of the days for weeks past. She looked at her tear-stained face in the mirror, set her teeth, and bathed herself for a quarter of an hour in cold water. Then she did her exercises until she felt warm and her muscles, that were out of practice, ached. As she did her long-neglected breathing exercises, a sense of harsh and bitter healing came over her.

The flat was silent; Sophie was nowhere to be seen. Dima

walked up to the piano with clenched fists, and when she began to sing, she shivered and felt as though she were diving into the depths from a great height. She tried the first act of *Tristan,* straining every nerve to wring the last atom from it. But always some little thing eluded her, and when much later the front-door bell broke into her loneliness, her eyes were dark and hungry. She opened the door absent-mindedly and started back, as the Kouczowska stepped across the threshold.

"Good morning," she said shyly. "You've been singing? Am I disturbing you?"

"No, not at all," stammered Dima in helpless confusion. The Kouczowska took her hand and the pressure left behind it a strange sensation of delicate breeding. "I've been longing to meet you, Fräulein Dima," she said, "and here I am. My husband knows nothing about it; he's still asleep. He's dead tired after *Tristan—"*

"It was marvelous yesterday—"

"Was it? I don't know. I wasn't in the theater; I haven't been for a long, a very long time," said the Kouczowska, looking at Dima with sad eyes. *How young she is; dear God! how marvelously young!* she thought.

"Can I do anything for you, *gnädige Frau?"* asked Dima mechanically, motioning with a conventional gesture to the unyielding horsehair sofa.

"No, Dima, I can't talk to you like that, I can't be conventional," said the Kouczowska, and her expression was almost humble. "I had to come and see you; I was so worried. I am conscious of you the whole time and I am constantly wondering what you are doing, thinking, why you are suffering, why you stand in front of our windows. No, Dima," she said hurriedly, "you mustn't do that, not that; I know what it means to stand outside in the dark before lighted windows—"

Dima blushed slowly and for the first time raised her

eyes and looked at the Kouczowska. She knew these eyes already, that hair, that mouth, those hands. They were strangely familiar to her. *His child will look like that—*

How hard her face is, worn out by weeping, thought the Kouczowska, and she said softly, "My husband has told me such a lot about you. He is very fond of you. He tells me you have the loveliest voice he has ever heard—that made me very jealous."

"Did it?" asked Dima clumsily, and the Kouczowska went on quickly: "One thing I wanted to tell you: you mustn't be angry with me. It's because of me that you are suffering, I know, and it worries me; but I can't help it and there is nothing I can do. You look at me and think that I'm lucky, that I've got everything, that I can bask in the sunshine. But Dima, dear Dima, just remember that I have lost my voice. I am no longer the Kouczowska. I can't sing any more. I'm nobody. I've lost all my world. I've kept nothing but my husband. You mustn't envy me. Oh," she said more softly, "to be able to sing Isolde again; I'd give everything to be able to do that again, everything."

Even your child? asked Dima's thoughts; and the Kouczowska answered them, so that Dima was startled.

"Even my child? I don't know. I shan't know that until it is alive, until I hold it in my arms. Perhaps a child will mean more; sometimes I imagine it will mean more than all that," she whispered, rather to herself than to Dima, and her hands pressed against her body in which the first tiny movement made itself felt.

"I would like to help you, Dima, so very much; but words are so inadequate. It sounds so empty to say to you: suffering is inevitable, is necessary; suffering must be experienced; we must be thankful for it. Otherwise we cannot be great artists. We are given suffering like a present, but we must learn to benefit by it. We must learn to meet it. We must." They stared into each other's eyes, and each

read in the other's glance as in a mirror: bitter sacrifice. They were silent for a long time and then Dima's head sank into her hands, and Maria's voice spoke. "You are young, and you can sing, and you have had your great and wonderful experience."

"No," whispered Dima through her hands, "not that; that has been dragged into the mire; there's nothing great and wonderful about it. An affair, just another affair. That isn't an experience."

"It is, Dima, it is. You have experienced something wonderful, and experience cannot be erased, it is never lost. You must be grateful and accept life to the full. Life is wonderful."

Dima smiled, believing only half she heard. But at the bottom of her heart she too accepted life. "But I've sunk so low; I've got to get out of it. If you will help me— I've lost my self-respect; but it's all been dragged down into the mire. My own mother has insisted that he must pay me —there, that's my experience."

"I've brought you her letter, Dima. He hasn't read it yet. It's a childish letter. Here you are; we'll tear it up— there. We mustn't take a thing like that seriously! Child, child," said the Kouczowska as Dima burst into heart-rending sobs. She took Dima's fists in her hands, and once again her fingers were so gentle but so firm that it was impossible to resist. "And self-respect! That's all nonsense! You've read about that somewhere. You shouldn't use such big words: lose one's self-respect. Heavens, where is my self-respect, I should like to know!"

"But he has hurt me so!"

"He is just stupid!"

Dima looked up quickly and suddenly she had to laugh, for Maria's remark had been so vehement and emphatic. "He's so naïve; he's such a child for all his forty-five years—"

"Forty-five?"

"Did he make himself out to be younger? Well, there you see what a baby he is. And for a child like you to talk of self-respect! If only you knew how beautiful and how blessedly young you are. It hurts to look at you, it hurts me to—"

Her eyes strayed away, wandered over the fussy wallpaper, and stopped as they reached the music on the piano. "Isolde—" she said. "You were singing when I came in. I stood on the stairs for a long time and listened. I must learn to listen, I find it so difficult. I haven't been inside the theater yet. I haven't been able to yet." She was silent, and then suddenly she begged, "You sing, Dima! There—sing the first act. I must learn to listen. I will accompany you."

"I can't get on with the first act; it won't come right. It worries me. Besides, I haven't been singing for so long," murmured Dima, but she was already standing expectantly by the piano. The Kouczowska noticed how her eyes became intense, and it made her heart burn. Yes; hands, eyes, and lips grew feverish like that when it was a question of singing. *"Erfuhrest du meine Schmach—"* she prompted hoarsely. With a passionate tremolo Dima began: *"Erfuhrest du meine Schmach, nun höre, was sie mir schuf—"* and she flung herself fiercely into the melody; the A sharp burst out scintillating like an unsheathed sword. Maria's eyes grew sad, and her lips twitched a little. Dima's voice soared in triumph, carrying the story wildly and unhesitatingly along with it. Maria's hands moved over the keys, giving sometimes a lead here, sometimes drawing out some not wholly appreciated passage from its dark corner, and softening others that were too crude. Sometimes she interrupted, saying gently, "No, I should do that differently; I should do it like this," and her pathetic, sick, and broken voice would pick out a word and

give it new meaning. Dima gazed at her hungrily. She felt as though Maria were walking in front of her through dark caves holding a light. Sometimes she was frightened, so tangibly near did Isolde appear; then she saw that Maria was crying silently, while her hands continued to move over the keys and her poor broken voice showed a new path. Dima could sing no more; she threw herself suddenly at Maria's feet, pulling her hands from the keyboard to her lips.

"There, there," whispered Maria, stroking the dark curls that tumbled so childishly and tempestuously about her knees. "There, there, what ridiculous fools we are, Dima, ridiculous; we're both crying; how absurd—"

There was a rustling at the door, something rattled at the keyhole. Dima was startled; the Kouczowska kept fast hold of her hands until they were calm and quiet again. Then Maria stood up. "I want to tell you something, and that is really why I came to see you. Yesterday after the performance a piece of scenery fell on May's foot; it's quite serious. Next week they are doing *Tristan* again and she won't be able to sing. My husband told me about it and said, 'I know an Isolde who would be suitable and that's the Dimatter.' I just wanted to tell you that. Wouldn't you like to sing Isolde in the Opera? I thought to myself: 'There's a goal worth aiming at, that should be enough to help anyone over their .troubles.' If only I could do it again, just once—"

"I am to—me? But I couldn't possibly; I don't know enough. Impossible," said Dima and moved away. "Impossible. A beginner like me! It's absurd. Nobody ever heard of such a thing."

"That's why, Dima. All my life I've always done what has never been done before. Then all goes well. If you like, my husband can have a word with the Director, can recommend you; he'd be glad to, I'm sure."

"Thanks," replied Dima curtly, suddenly withdrawing herself. "Thanks. I don't want any favors from him. And if anything is done at all—I must fight my way through—by myself."

"That's right, Dima, that's fine. To fight your way alone. You're quite right, one is alone in this world, one remains alone, and one must fend for oneself. The most difficult things of all must be done alone, and we all live on our own little islands, believe me," said the Kouczowska; and Dima looked into her eyes, that were so familiar with suffering, and believed her.

"Now I must go," said the Kouczowska, for the noise at the keyhole became more and more insistent. "I wish you —oh, I wish you everything I have lost, Dima. And, think kindly of us."

Then Dima stood alone in the room, and the air was still full of words and sounds and excitement. Dima closed her eyes, and a feeling of new happiness enveloped her whole being. Fräulein Sophie entered the room very carefully and sniffed the air critically. Dima flung on her coat and rushed out of the house.

She rushed through the streets like a mad thing, for quite suddenly, in a blinding flash, she had grasped the first act. She had grasped it at last; it burned in her like a fever. Phrase after phrase grew upon her; gestures, pictures, sounds materialized. She ran on, ran as far as the Prater, found herself standing under an old tree, singing, and then again lying full length on a bench, sobbing with violently trembling lips. She walked on between the faded crudities of the closed booths mastering this: *"Das Schwert, ich liess es sinken."* She bought two apples from a street vendor, and ate them leaning against a wall, while she wondered how to raise the chalice ceremoniously, with both hands clasped tightly round it, and lift it high.

For three whole days this tumult raged; and then Isolde

was complete. Dima looked at her face in a mirror and found it new and absorbed. Her experience with Rassiem now seemed to her as remote as if it had been seen through the wrong end of an opera glass—small, distant, and unnatural. She smiled in wonderment, and realized that these past nights had been free of the tormenting hunger for him, for his arms, his lips, and she breathed a deep sigh of relief. But Maria had kindled another fire within her, that gave no peace and made her restless. During this time she often stood still, listening to her innermost self; her thoughts would return for the hundredth time to Maria's last proposal and she smiled disbelievingly and repeated: *Impossible.* The newspapers issued statements on the accident to Fräulein May. The next performance of *Tristan* had to be temporarily postponed.

Dima spent a week going through her repertoire and bringing fresh ideas to all her roles. At home she was left in peace; Fräulein Sophie crept about filled with anxiety; there was no further mention of Capital. Then came a frightening period in which all the wounds opened again, all the old suffering returned; the nights burned, the days were one long rattling chain of thoughts and torments. *Work, work,* moaned Dima's heart hungrily. She devoted five days to studying Beethoven's difficult aria, *"Ah perfido,"* which she had never been able to master before; then she was left with nothing to do again. The papers reported that Fräulein May's condition had taken a deplorable turn for the worse; inflammation of the vein had set in, a long and weary business. A Leonora from Dresden had given a guest performance, and had not been a success—

And then Dima made her decision, and what followed was like the course of an illness, a period of unconsciousness during which all poisons were driven out, and her will-power directed itself toward one object alone: to sing

in the Opera. Certain details penetrated her consciousness as through a veil; matters of secondary importance she ignored, not allowing them into her consciousness.

She was wearing white gloves and asking the supercilious hotel porter for Herr Blaulich. She was sitting between two awkward beginners and a worn-out bass-buffo on a sofa in an impersonal hotel room; the wallpaper had an untidy design of onions. There was a smell of onions, for Herr Blaulich had had a meal in this room. He came in from the next door room, gave her two fingers of his sticky hand and pulled her after him. She found herself leaning against a piano, on which a spidery young man accompanied her very unrhythmically, singing the *Liebestod.* She spoke, and saw Blaulich's blue, grinning face grow thoughtful, then start to grin again. "Impossible," he said. "Go to Graz, my child; I can get you a job in Graz. But don't talk such nonsense; the idea of giving a guest performance in the Vienna Opera! You must be quite mad. Or have you got influence? Eh? An affair with a prince? Your figure would be good enough!"

"Graf Scheibbs-Monti, the Minister, is my father," said Dima. Blaulich walked to the window, whistling a tune, "You can have supper with me tomorrow: we'll talk it over again," he remarked casually.

Dima caught sight of herself in the mirror of a shop window; she walked toward it, tall, slim, and with head held high; her unruly hair was as tidy as possible, and she was simply but neatly dressed. The butler at the Ministry bowed deeply. Her card was sent in to the Minister during his consulting hours and, bored and somewhat curious, he had her brought in to him; standing before him she was almost as tall as he was. He said, "Dear Fräulein," and, "What can I do for you?" studying in amazement the determined lines round her mouth, her straight, aristocratic nose with its twitching nostrils, and the reserve of

her expression. *She is not at all like her mother,* he thought. Dima spoke with reserve, quiet and assured in a voice which gained depth from excitement. Not for one second did she remember that His Excellency was her father; he was just a clever, refined, rather tired gentleman who could help her, must help her. She had taken off her glove while she was speaking, and her hand was resting on the arm of the stiff, meager Empire chair. The Minister gazed at this hand, and then at his own; they lay beside each other like brother and sister—long, powerful, thin; the joint of the index finger imperceptibly bent, with strong blue veins under the brown skin; the nails were curved and of perfect shape; below the thumb both hands had the same tiny red mole.

His Excellency rose, promising every possible assistance with the Director and the Superintendent's office; today, even. At the door he took her hand, and kissed it with a gesture which was not entirely, not completely controlled. Dima thanked him coolly and walked away with her long, swinging stride.

Dima spent an evening in the company of Herr Blaulich, who ate too much, drank too much, smoked too much, and pawed her neck and hips with his warm, clammy hands. He breathed heavily in her face and roguishly demanded a kiss before the guest performance and the rest afterward. Over the dessert she was obliged to sign a contract which bound her to Blaulich's agency for five years. From time to time she pushed his knee away when it became too insistent under the table and all the while she thought, *I shall sing in the Opera.*

Dima stood in the long twilit passage that led to the offices of the Opera, staring at the engravings and portraits of forgotten stars. There were a great many doors here and a familiar musty smell. A porter called her name, her heart beat, she was standing in a bright room opposite two eyes

which casually yet carefully took stock of her. A wonderfully deep, ringing voice addressed her, brusquely at first, then in slight astonishment, then with a warmth that seemed almost to be shaking hands with her. She had no idea of her replies. The Director gave her his hand. Next Thursday there would be an audition—

She practiced her roles, over and over again. At night, awakening, she thought, *Rassiem—?* How remote. She could even smile, so invulnerable had she become.

She walked to the Opera beneath a clear frosty sky. The red of the tramcars shouted in the sun. Fräulein Sophie came out of the church and walked in front of her with short, hurried steps on her high heels, without seeing her. At the theater Sophie hid herself behind a pillar at the entrance for ladies of the ballet. From there she could see her child, walking along so slender and so assured, being greeted politely by a porter and shown up the stairs to the Directorate. The porter telephoned to the Secretary's office that the lady had arrived for the audition; bells rang through the house. Two bad-tempered conductors followed Dima along a stone-flagged passage in which their footsteps resounded. They passed tables full of properties. The stage was before her, looking incredibly wide; a single lamp shed a miserable light. In the background hung a backcloth of sea, cypresses, and blue sky. A piano stood on one side, a bored conductor announced his name and continued his conversation with another man.

A seat banged in the boundless darkness of the auditorium; voices arose from its depths. The conductor's bridge was swung up over the orchestra, someone ran quickly across it. Shrouded chandeliers hung heavily in the grayness of backstage like sleeping bats. In the corners lurked motionless workmen. Dima looked round, up into the network of the leafy flies, at the backcloth, the prompt box. She breathed deeply of this air, bitter with grease

paint, glue, mastic, and the smell of heated people. She smiled at the exaggeratedly blue sky, the red lamps in the footlights so familiar to her from childhood, and her heart felt free and light and warm. The conductor struck a few notes on the piano; from down below the deep pleasant voice of the Director said, "What do you want to sing, Fräulein?"

"Preferably, *'Ah perfido!'* "

There was astonished murmuring in the depths. "We haven't got that here!" called a messenger, who was standing by the piano. "It's such an unusual thing," said the conductor ill-temperedly. "The 'Fidelio' aria would do just as well."

"Send for the aria at once!" ordered the Director. The murmuring down below did not cease. A conductor came over the bridge from the auditorium and took a good look at Dima. "Are you nervous, Fräulein?" he asked in a friendly way.

"No."

"No? That's brave of you. And that difficult aria too! Something different for a change! That's courageous! Ah, there is the music."

Dima sang. At first her voice seemed small and lonely in the immense hall; how tremendously far it was to the galleries! Dima raised her eyes and gazed into the blackness, up to the spot where she thought she usually sat, high up in the fourth balcony, to the left of the second pillar. As she sang, it seemed to her that all the heat and clamorous enchantment and happiness which she had experienced up there returned to her. She was intensely conscious of herself standing on the immense, beloved stage which had given her pleasure evening after evening; she was overcome with an overwhelming desire to give thanks for all she had experienced here. And she expressed this feeling in her singing. She finished. Down below there was

murmuring again; somebody shouted "Lights, please!" There was a blinding dazzle of light about her and the footlights seemed to cut her like a whip as they struck up into her face. It had been like this in her dreams, and in her childhood: this bright light, this smell, and this blue, flat sky; and the blackness full of heads that were listening and eagerly receptive.

Someone pushed a couch onto the stage, a dirty, gray-green thing. Someone demanded an extract from the first act of *Tristan and Isolde.* The conductor gave Brangane's cue in a high, crowing voice: *"Weh, ach wehe, dies zu dulden!"* And Dima plunged headlong into it, fists clasped, staking everything on: *"Doch nun von Tristan—"*

Dima walked up the steps of the Conservatoire. She was wearing the old white silk blouse. She pressed the piano score to her heart that was pounding, pounding, as though it would burst.

Upstairs the class was pursuing its usual peaceful course. Rassiem was walking up and down in long sweeping strides, his hands behind his back. Gelfius was accompanying, thin, untidy, ironical. At the piano stood the little Hartwig, her eyes burning, singing staccato exercises; she was singing them very badly, for Rassiem was not looking at her, nor at the little Bach who was making eyes at the tenor! The Karlskirche clock struck eleven.

The door opened and Dima entered. "Good morning," she said quietly. Rassiem stared at her helplessly. *She's going to make a scene here,* he thought, and took hold of Gelfius. But Dima said, "I wanted to ask you to be good enough to go through Isolde with me again. I am to sing it with you next week in the Opera, Herr Kammersänger."

Her eyes were full of an indefinable, proud, exhausted smile. Rassiem opened his mouth, speechless. He looked ridiculous.

Chapter Twenty-Five: THE TORCH IS OUT

ELIS AWOKE EARLY, as though an unseen hand had pushed her into the day; her first thought was: *Today, then.*

Her heart pained her in a mild and tiring manner. She lay for a time with her eyes wide open, gazing hungrily at the room. It was strange to watch the daylight growing steadily stronger outside the window, embracing the outlines of the furniture and lifting them into reality. It was strange to be watching this when one knew that there would be no more such mornings. The house was quiet and listening; Punch, the little dog, was silenced by death. He had caught a slight cough, had developed pneumonia, and had been put to sleep by the vet. Elis had watched with a calm matter-of-fact curiosity; it had been nothing more than a shiver and a stretching—finished.

It had been just the same with Mamma.

She stood in front of the tall mirror looking at her delicate, white, childish figure; it pleased her. She caressed her shoulders and the points of her little breasts, that were as cool as flowers; she spoke comfortingly to her reflection: "Be good, keep calm. You'll soon be done with yearning and all the rest of it." The reflection smiled back intimately and looked cold. Later on she went into the garden, stroking earth and foliage, and said, "We aren't going to be sentimental, are we? That would be in bad taste. After we have arranged everything so well!" But earth and foliage were very much alive and were estranged from her. She had a headache and laughed it off; her thoughts were pleasantly confused, although she had not taken any morphia for four whole days. She had thought: *One won't be able to remember how one feels if one's head is so thick and stupid.*

"No, of course not," she added aloud, amused. She was

possessed of a strange hunger to look at everything, to feel everything, and to speak to everything. Things were alive, colorful as they had never been before, and it seemed to her that she must remember exactly how everything looked. Outside a soft, watery snow was falling. Drips ran down the windowpanes, leaving behind transparent, wavy lines. Was there any sense in these wet paths and their crossings over one another and disappearances?

No. There was no sense in that.

A drop came slipping slowly down the windowpane, another came to meet it; they joined up for a second, and then they flowed apart again. One rolled heavily, roundly, straight down; the other slipped on in a tired zigzag, lost its shape, and disappeared imperceptibly without reaching a goal.

"That's just how things happen," said Elis. Everything she thought and spoke and did seemed to her strangely dramatic and unreal, but it pleased her. A deep organ undercurrent droned its constant accompaniment of today, today, today.

She went to her writing-desk and went through all her preparations again. There was the bottle of morphia, shimmering, indolent, and silvery. It had taken weeks to collect this large amount on Mamma's old prescription. One couldn't get a great deal at a time, one had to work out a highly complicated system. But it should suffice now.

There was her will, which she read through, not without pride: *I am going away because I am tired. Life makes one feel ashamed. I don't want to carry on any longer. There is no other reason. My books and music are to be given to Gelfius. My jewelry Dima can have if she wants it. To Fräulein Eva Hartwig, of the first Preparatory Class, I leave the photograph which stands on the piano. I beg my father not to feel upset; it's a mere nothing.*

That was simply and well said. She licked the envelope

and wrote on the outside in large, important letters, *To be opened after my death.* There. Now the ticket for the box this evening. There it was, a small red piece of paper: *Dress Circle, No. 9.*

Elis closed her eyes and pictured, with painful distinctness, the Opera house brilliantly lit, full of people, and in the gallery a swimming mass of heads. Then it became dark and quiet, and only a green light glowed from the orchestra pit. The *Tristan* overture began. A beginner, a very talented young girl, is singing Isolde. Tristan appears on the stage, a somewhat *passé* tenor with a very bad reputation. The two of them have had an affair but that is finished now; in the thirteenth row, the artists' row, sits his wife with her satisfied, possessive hands clasped in her lap. The music streams forth like gold and blood and crimson. The music is marvelous. In a box, in the ninth box in the dress circle, a pretty young lady has fallen asleep and she is not interested in what is going on. Let all the other people torment themselves with what cannot be explained, with the vulgarity of life. The young lady is wearing a white dress, with a pearl necklace round her throat—she is asleep.

One must put a visiting-card in one's bag, and write one's address on it; otherwise one will be taken to some horrid hospital. What will Gelfius say, dear, good Gelfius? What will the newspapers say? Something like this: *Death in the midst of Beauty.* Yes, that was really what it was. To listen to *Tristan* and die.

What would *he* think: One might perhaps be carried into a cloakroom—afterward—into his dressing-room. The doctor in attendance at the theater would say, "It is all over."

He would burst into the room, and cry "Elis, my darling! Forgive me!" He would fall to the ground, kiss those hands, those lips; those lips once again, as he had before—

Elis stood up, smiling softly. *So one was past feeling it,* she thought; her heart was so tired. Her heart said something to her, and she was frightened. *Must it be?* it asked.

Yes, it must be.

Why, but why?

Why? thought Elis, and burning tears welled up in her eyes. *Why? Don't ask any more. Don't think any more. Don't go over the old familiar paths again. I'm finished with it. Oh, I have always been finished with it; if I were to think things over again; always I have said* No *to life and* Yes *to death.*

Death? said her heart. What a noisy word. *One doesn't die. One may be transformed into a tree, a spray of flowers, sweet-smelling earth, a dragon-fly's wing. One has a future. We won't talk about it any more.*

The maidservant brought a message. The Herr Professor would not be down to dinner, he had work to do; the young lady would have to dine alone.

Alone. All right. As if one could ever be anything other than alone. I should have liked to have seen him again, before—

Elis ate a little, and afterward she burned her diary and her poem and a few pressed flowers. One ought to have some flowers, roses or narcissi. She dressed herself, and wandered into the town, driven on by this strange, hungry curiosity. The people in the streets had gray mask-like, weary faces. How poor they were, how comical and how stupid. Had nobody thought how easy and simple it was to escape? Go away from it all?

The window displays were attractive and interesting; fashion was changing; the straight lines of the Empire style were coming in. When one was out of mourning for Mamma, one might have a turquoise-blue Empire frock made, with silver lace—

No. One would not be able to do that.

The *Italian Journey,* bound in brown leather, as a Christmas present for Gelfius. Oh, nonsense, nonsense, all nonsense. Today, today, today.

When Elis returned home with her narcissi she found Gelfius sitting at the piano playing Bach. "What's the matter, Elis?" he asked quickly when he saw her face.

"Why? What should be the matter? Good afternoon, Gelfius—nothing's the matter."

"You are so pale, Elis. What's wrong? Still the same trouble?"

"Am I pale? I'm sorry. I wanted—I don't want to be paler than usual today. Why have you come here?"

"I had to tell you something. But, Elis, I must have a cheerful face first, please."

"Must you? Well, I'm laughing now. I'm cheerful, Gelfius, really I am."

"The Philharmonic Society are going to perform my symphony," he said, almost choking with pleasure. "Just think, Elis! the Philharmonic!"

"Oh, Gelfius, how marvelous! Yes, now you're all making your careers, you and Dima and everybody. I can't imagine what it is about you all; for all of you everything is so straightforward—"

"And you? Still up in the clouds?"

"Oh, no. Everything is quite straightforward with me too, now—I hope. But we won't talk about me. How did it all happen so quickly with your symphony?"

Gelfius drummed on his knees. "Well, in a word, *he* helped me: Rassiem."

"He—"

"He is a good fellow," said Gelfius carefully.

Elis shook her head, and her mouth became hard.

"Elis, my child, do talk reasonably for once. What did he do to you? Has he done you any wrong? Do for once get it off your chest. You always begin by making allu-

sions and then you either cry or laugh. Has he done you any wrong?"

Elis put her hands to her face and whispered, "He kissed me."

"You've told me that already. What else?"

"What else? Nothing else. I thought he loved me. He kissed me, and did not love me—" But she said these words inaudibly.

Twilight was falling. Gelfius nodded thoughtfully and with a listening smile on his ugly face he played a few lingering notes on the piano. A catching of the breath, a yearning for something: the *Tristan* motive.

"Are you going to the Opera tonight, Elis? The gallery is wildly excited; it's the turning-point in the Dimatter's career today. Are you going?"

"Perhaps."

"Have you done your harmony?"

Elis laughed loudly and unrestrainedly. *What a ridiculous question,* she thought, inwardly much amused; *study harmony today.* Suddenly a breathless anxiety overcame her. "Time is slipping past. It's quite dark already. What's the time?"

Gelfius held his watch in the remaining feeble light that was creeping in at the window. "Half-past five."

Elis's hands began to tremble. "I am afraid you must go now, Gelfius. I've got things to do. It is time to say good-by."

"Of course," he said sadly, "my bad manners again! I never realize what a nuisance I am. Well, good-by."

"Good-by," said Elis, holding his big, warm hand for a second longer. "Good-by." She could not help crying. It was absurd and not according to plan. By now the room was in total darkness, the corners were like black velvet. Gelfius could hear Elis's breathing, which was quick and restrained. Gently he stroked her cheeks, which he could

not see; they were wet with tears. How he loved her; loved her so much—

"Elis," he whispered, "don't cry, don't waste any more tears on that. It's just nonsense, ridiculous childish nonsense, believe me. Do you want to be ridiculous? How can you let a thing like that upset you so? You don't sing any more, you talk as though you were asleep. Do wake up, wake up! You are always just dreaming. When life really begins, real life, I mean, it will have much worse knocks in store for you, believe me. It's got fists like a furniture remover; and one must be thankful for those knocks, Elis."

She frowned, which he could not see in the darkness. *I don't want to have anything to do with furniture removers,* she thought. She felt Gelfius's hands on her hair and most unexpectedly those broad, sure hands were trembling. "I know," she said almost inaudibly. "I know. Hush! Be quiet. Don't talk about it. And say good-by. Good-by."

"Good-by." His voice came after a slight pause from the direction of the door. The latch fell with a soft snap. "Thanks," whispered Elis to the darkness. Then she lit the light. It was time. Now it was time. Her skin seemed to contract as though a shiver passed through her, but it was hot in this room. She dressed herself with hurried, wooden movements, in the grip of a confused drowsiness through which occasionally something would penetrate like a cry. It was worse than stage-fright. The white dress and the white face were reflected in the green light of the mirror. *Dream princess, little dream princess, where are you going to now? Home, home, to Mother. There are signposts along all the way—if only one had a voice and a life's work perhaps it would be worth while. No, not even then. Now for the narcissi. Dima will be excited by now, too. Gloves, morphia, visiting-card, some money. Ready. Put out the light.*

Dear God! Dear God!

Suddenly she was plunged into a choking panic. Horror laid its icy hold on her. Her heart beat furiously. It clung to worldly things and screamed, *Don't die! Don't die!* The room was filled with sighs and glaring yellow visions. For a few seconds.

Then it was over. With shaking knees, and empty head, Elis left, shutting the doors behind her. The staircase was dark. But from up above, from Father's studio door, shone a faint light. Father was standing up there, leaning over the banisters, and he called to her.

"Yes, Father?"

"Are you going to the theater, child? Can you come up to me for a moment? I want to show you something."

"Yes, Father."

She walked heavily between the white figures. In front of her she saw Father's bowed back, that looked so tired. In the farthest room, beneath the dazzling light of the reflectors, loomed a gigantic block. A man with bursting muscles pressed against it with head and shoulders wearing himself unconscious with the effort. It was a hopeless endeavor to try and move the weight from its place.

"It's finished, our memorial," said Professor Kerckhoff, looking hungrily into Elis's vacant eyes.

"Yes, Father."

It was so silent in the studio; next door a tap dripped monotonously; all the statues stood around staring.

"It's so heavy—it would weigh so heavily if one had to lie beneath it," said Elis after a long time, as though asleep. And as though she were asleep she turned round and walked away. Her hand brushed her father's, then the wood of the door, then over the lovely cold body of the wrestler, over the cracked curve of the banisters, over the iron lock of the gate, which slowly shut behind her.

Immediately after she had taken her place within the high red walls of her closed box, the house was plunged in

darkness and the overture began. Elis listened calmly; the sounds seemed to come from a great distance. She wanted to give herself up to it as she used to do, but she could not. She was tired, cold, and plagued with headache. She stared at something bright somewhere, the light of an emergency lamp. The overture reached its climax and died away; the pain disappeared. Then the curtain went up.

A heavy, dangerous, impossible, orange-yellow; a dark, vanishing path that seemed to stare into space; a solitary voice over the sea: *"Irische Maid"*—it was Isolde sailing up—*"du wilde, minnige Maid."*

Dima? No, Isolde.

Austere, slim, a girl. Her mouth was as though carved of stone, fair hair in heavy waves and plaits surrounded that hard face. *"Wer wagt mich zu hohnen?"* And then more quietly, every word torn reluctantly from those dumb lips: *"Bragane, du? Sag, wo sind wir?"*

The house took a deep breath. Elis leaned forward. *Come to me, sweet, burning dangerous happiness. Come to me, music that makes one weak and intoxicated and makes reality seem grayer than ever and life more impossible. How Dima can sing! It's unbelievable that she should be able to sing like that. She's not ashamed, she has no fear, she is free and in the midst of living things. Her voice gives all it has. There, she's got that from me, I showed her that, that dropping of the hands. What a strange casket; the poison must be in that.*

Poison. Have I left my morphia behind? Now, now, now, open; open wide . . .

The pennants flutter in the breeze. Tristan stands stiffly at the helm, without looking up.

Elis, whose hands are loosely clasped round the morphia bottle, lets them sink into her lap and gives herself up to the music. The opera continues. Isolde's pain mounts up; frenzy, defiance, and flight. The sailors sing.

Land is near. And Tristan, stiff, gloomy Tristan prepares to drink atonement.

Elis awoke to a raging, biting pain. Those two down there were falling into an embrace, which was without bounds. Isolde? No, Dima. Dima and him. That's naked, ugh! how naked! Will this kiss never come to an end? The house shivers and vibrates. . . . The act is at an end; the lights go up. There is applause. One is confused. No, in real life things don't happen as they do in opera. Thank God! But this Dimatter girl deserves our respect; she's got talent. What a voice. And what a figure. And such personality. She's supposed to be connected with the Minister? With that dear old gentleman in the Jockey Club's box? The one who's applauding so enthusiastically? Nonsense; she was Rassiem's last affair. Aha! That's where all the pep comes from! There was fear and trembling in that embrace. Rassiem, on the other hand—well—of course—he's very good, extremely dramatic. But his voice—? Be careful, his wife is sitting behind there. That interesting-looking woman, with the red hair. She was a famous singer too, wasn't she? Yes, but that's a long time ago. The Minister is still clapping; perhaps there is some truth in it? Colleagues in the artists' box were clapping and looking encouraging. Fräulein Sophie and Frau Edlinger in the stalls were crying with pleasure. Herr Edlinger was running about in the orchestra pit, perspiring freely and buttonholing all his colleagues in turn and talking at them urgently. Herr Blaulich was sitting with greedy eyes in the official box, whistling a few notes to himself—a sort of travesty of the yearning motive. The gallery was teeming, seething, and raving. Some were enthusiastic; some were envious; some were entranced; some disgusted; some quarreled, shouted, clapped, again, again, again, bravo Dimatter, and again. Bravo! The covers of music scores slammed. Rassiem's class stood like an army, close round Gelfius,

shouting, "Bravo, Rassiem, bravo!" Fräulein Hartwig, small and passionate, balanced on Dima's former seat, was holding forth: "To whom does the Dimatter owe her technique? Her expression? Her acting? In fact, everything? To whom? Why, Rassiem, of course! Bravo, Rassiem, three cheers for Rassiem. Hurray!" Elis, shut away in her box, gazed into the black living mass down below in the stalls and up above in the circles. *People are so funny, so very funny.* There's noise and shouting and life. The candelabra glittered like so many polished knives.

It won't hurt, will it? There won't be any horrid unpleasantnesses? Stomach-ache, sickness, convulsions? No, no, in the Dictionary it says—

Silence. Darkness. The second act.

Night. A thousand stars above a purple garden. Horns sound, farther and farther away. The breathing earth speaks, the trees, the spring. The torch burns. The torch is out.

The torch is out.

Night, oh, night, that only knows two things, yearning and fulfillment.

Two people love each other. That's what it is like when two people love each other. Two people return to mother earth. Two people become one with the world. Not to awake—never to awake—

That is what it is like to die: and endlessly prolonged happiness. Never to awake— A light streams from the music and reveals in a flash the secrets of the soul. And again, and again, never to awake, never to awake—

To you people down there, the dawn will come, but to me never more. Never to awake. That one's hand should be beset with such trembling. The glass rattled against the teeth, the jaw was stiff, as though frozen. *I can't. Oh, God! dear Lord! I can't. Help me, Mamma, Mamma, I'm trembling so appallingly, help me! Ugh! Coward! Down*

with it. Bitter—bitter—bitter—
Clouds . . . cold . . . Mamma . . . the door . . . is opening . . . there's . . . ringing . . . ringing . . . ringing . . .

Chapter Twenty-Six: BRAVO, DIMA

IT WAS ALL OVER. Hannes Rassiem pulled Dima before the curtain for the last time. In front the brightly lit house went mad, and sent shouts and applause across the footlights. The orchestra pit, quickly emptied, was dark, lying between stage and audience like a smooth, silent river. A burning heat poured across it.

Behind the curtain the stage was already only half-lit, looking gray and dusty. Silent men dragged the scenery away, the backcloth with the walls of the castle went up into the roof and disclosed the naked depths of backstage, where yellow-covered objects crowded like animals. Dima could feel how Rassiem's damp hand, which clasped hers, was trembling. Throughout the whole evening his hands, his body, tormented by stage-fright, had trembled like this. Now, after the curtain had fallen, he let go of Dima's fingers limply. "That was a success!" he said tonelessly.

"I think you were wonderful," replied Dima looking up at him laughingly and excitedly. And she noticed how his face had fallen in beneath the grease paint, in utter exhaustion. Suddenly she was aware of stinging tears in her eyes. This was Rassiem, this strange, tired creature, this old actor who trembled before the public, whose hair stuck damply to his painted forehead, whose breath came in difficult gasps. This man who was wrapped up in a cloak and left the stage with dragging steps. His shadow, large and distorted, crept behind him across the boards. Then a fireman came with his little lantern and took his place on the huge stage. It was over.

Then she was sitting in her dressing-room, having her wig and costume removed. The old dresser was telling how talented Fräulein Dimatter had been as a child, always in the front of the street urchins in *Carmen,* waving her little flag, and then in *Evangelimann* she'd sung as clearly and sweetly as a little bird. And now this success, this marvelous success! And what happiness for her two sisters! And the Herr Kammersänger too! For he was the Fräulein's teacher! Moreover, the Herr Kammersänger was marvelous, simply marvelous today! Yes, competition, youth, put one on one's mettle. And is Fräulein really only just twenty? Where on earth does she get it from? Such acting, such expression! It makes one think of the Kouczowska, who was the finest Isolde!

Dima listened to this flow of words in a pleasant daze; her blood coursed warmly and richly through her veins. She stretched herself, with a glorious feeling of freedom. There was a knock; Fräulein Sophia and Frau Edlinger pushed their way in and pressed themselves in embarrassment against the wall. Fräulein Sophie put a raw egg on the table. "The best thing for your throat!" she murmured and looked round her. It was handsome here, with basket-chairs and big mirrors and curtains. In the chorus and ballet dressing-room the smell was different too. "I congratulate you on your success!" said Frau Edlinger and started to cry again. "Shall I help you dress?" she asked earnestly, and Fräulein Sophie secretly stroked Dima's arm. Herr Blaulich sent in his card to say he was expecting Fräulein Dimatter to supper at the Grand Hotel.

"Marvelous!" said Dima. "We shall have champagne there. I must drink today. Good Lord, I'm drunk already, I don't really know how I feel. Go on ahead, and give him my love in the meantime!"

"He hasn't invited us; how do you know that he will like it if I'm there too," said Fräulein Sophie naïvely.

Dima laughed and became quickly serious. "I went out with him alone once. Do it again? Oh, no. Go on, off you go! You just go along, old chaperon, you can have a kiss too; you too, Gusti, and you too, you dear old dresser! I'm quite crazy! Crazy! Crazy!" she shouted happily, and danced between mirror and washstand. "Now I'm beginning to realize that I have sung. I've won through, I've won through!"

The family departed with tears in their eyes; Fräulein Sophie took the egg away with her again. While Dima was putting on her shoes, she suddenly felt depressed; in the second act her breathing hadn't been correct; there was so much to learn still.

There was another knock; the door was opened carefully and Rassiem entered. "Gentlemen are strictly forbidden to enter the ladies' dressing-rooms. Paragraph five of the Rules of the House," he said respectfully and took his stand before the mirror. The dresser laughed. Rassiem took hold of her, planted a kiss on her nose, and sang, "Leave us, Princess, leave us alone. Tralala." The door closed and there was silence. Dima unconsciously pulled her dress together.

"Dima—" said Hannes Rassiem uncertainly.

She looked at him; he was different again now. Not Tristan any longer. Not an old, tired actor. "Hannes?"

His eyes were bright, with large black pupils; his fair hair was brushed straight up in the air; his hands looked cool and peaceful. He brought in with him the smell of Eau-de-Cologne and a fresh-smelling English soap.

"I—oh, Dima, I can't put it into words. Are you—? No, just be nice again. I didn't mean to hurt you. I simply can't help it."

She looked at him, and slowly the tears gathered in her eyes, and a smile crept into them because of his childishness. She was silent, for a long time, almost a minute. A

whole year with its silent, beckoning pictures passed through the room. Riches, renunciation, and riches again. She merely nodded.

"Thanks," he whispered passionately and flung himself over her hands. There was pose in his movement. "Thank you, too," said Dima almost inaudibly over his bowed, stiff neck. She bent her head lower, momentarily moved. No. It was past.

A vulgar noise came along the passage. "Tristan! Beloved! Rassiem! Where the devil are you?"

"Here," shouted Rassiem in relief; he was afraid of the silence and had not known what else to say.

Gelfius appeared with a deep bow. "Your wife is waiting for you on the stairs. How long are you going to be? You mustn't keep her too long—ah, the prima donna!" he said, and then much quieter, with a tight squeeze of the hand: "Good, it was fine, Dimatter."

The dresser was waiting in the passage and helped Rassiem into his warm coat and Gelfius wound a thick scarf round his throat. Rassiem held a handkerchief before his mouth. On the staircase stood Maria, calling, "Don't talk, Hannes! Take care of yourself! It's so foggy outside!" Then she noticed Dima, who was walking behind him on the stairs, and she went up to her, no longer quite so formal and reserved.

Faint cheers came from the direction of the stage door; Rassiem was being packed into his car. Maria put her firm, delicate hands round Dima's face, lifted it up to her, and kissed her on the lips. They separated, strangely happy and moved, without exchanging a word.

At the stage door they were held up; mingled with the cries of *Bravo!* came a shrill ringing whistle, and an ambulance dashed up the drive and stopped by the porter's lodge. Heads appeared in the light of the lamps, a vague confusion of voices and figures. In the momentary hush a

dark burden was carried out, uncannily. What was up? What was wrong? An accident? A case of fainting. A lady had fainted in one of the boxes.

"You two sang so rottenly that it made people ill," said Gelfius. Berger swept his hat off with a flourish, and the car disappeared into the fog.

Chapter Twenty-Seven: TO LIVE IS WONDERFUL

THE SKY WAS BLUE, RIDICULOUSLY BLUE, like an oleograph of the Bay of Naples. There were cypresses too, standing tall and dark in the sun. In the old footprints round the grave the frost had made round, white-veined crusts of ice; the new footprints ran crisscross over the brown, clayey earth. The clods of earth that were thrown down were frozen hard and made a harsh, unseemly noise on the coffin. Black-clothed people, huddled together in a bunch, stood irresolutely round the grave. Nobody wanted to be the first to go. A young girl with large, horrified eyes uttered tiny, hysterical, tearless sobs; next to Fräulein Hartwig stood Herr Kammersänger Rassiem, who had sent a large wreath, and had attended the funeral ceremony in a top hat and black gloves. The tears ran down his cheeks like those of a child. In the background stood Gelfius, freezing, and oppressed because he was wearing a light-brown overcoat; he glowered at the oily priest who was delivering a meaningless funeral oration. Dima held his hand and could feel an inner tempest raging in him.

At last Professor Kerckhoff turned away from the grave, gazed with a helpless smile at all the faces and hands, and walked away, small and self-absorbed, to the gateway. Out there the black carriages were waiting; steam rose from the heavy black horses into the clear frosty air; the faces of the coachmen were red and cheerful.

"Gelfius—?" asked Professor Kerckhoff uncertainly,

gazing with his red, blinking, tired eyes at the sunlight which was painting the graveyard wall yellow. "Gelfius—?"

"Here," answered Gelfius mechanically, as though in answer to a command.

"You must be so good as to come and see us sometimes; there are some books and music. I don't understand it—the child—has left me—all alone in the house. There are some books and music; they belong to you. She left a will, quite a childish thing it was, a will written on such a funny piece of paper. A page torn from an exercise book, you know, with ruled lines. A page with ruled lines, like a schoolgirl—I can't understand it—I can't understand it," he whispered, shaking his head. Some brown plaster clung to his hair at the temples.

"You must come, I'm so alone in the house. I've designed a new tombstone, you must see it. The child—came and said good-by to me; I didn't understand. She said the memorial was so heavy, that it would weigh so heavily. So I made a new one. What else was there for me to do during these nights? Work remains, it's the only thing left, isn't it, Gelfius? It's quite different from all my other things: a boy, very delicate, quite small, who is lying on the ground drawing water with both hands and drinking. Do you think that would please her?" he asked, raising his sunken face. "You knew her better; would that please her? I didn't really know her at all, my child, my little Liesel—"

"Number four!" shouted the coachman. "If you please, your honor! Number four, that's your carriage!"

"You must come, Gelfius; I'm all alone in the house. You shall see what I am doing, and you must play me your new compositions; there's always one's work," murmured Kerckhoff and allowed himself to be packed into the carriage without demur.

"Ladies and gentlemen, if you please, the Musical So-

ciety this way!" somebody cried, and eager hands propelled Gelfius on to a black carriage seat. Inside he fell on top of Rassiem, and later on Dima was pushed in. Then they started to move with encouraging creaks and groans, swinging along in the cold, bright world alongside the cemetery wall.

They were silent. Fields passed by, blue-white, germinating with life beneath their sunny mantle of snow, huts, houses, advertisements, shops, people, children, dogs, a church, a small gay market, barracks—all the things belonging to normal daily life.

"May I smoke?" asked Rassiem, and did not wait for an answer. Dima gazed incessantly at Gelfius's hands, that looked so savagely miserable, thrust into ridiculous black cotton gloves, and firmly clutching a few bedraggled white carnations. He followed her glance, discovered the carnations and thought, *I forgot to give her the flowers.* He threw them out of the window. Dima's eyes followed them onto the street that was bathed in sunlight, people, and noise. Trees stretched themselves expectantly in the frost. The muscles played beautifully beneath the smooth skin of the horses. In a rush of feeling she embraced everything, the glassy deep blue sweeping curve of the sky above, and in the same instant the steam which arose from the gold-brown horse dung lying in the road. The world breathed with the beat of her heart, an inexplicable joy made her lift her arms like wings and she cried, "Yes, yes, to live is wonderful. It's marvelous to be alive."

Those are trumpets, thought Gelfius, for the rhythm of the drive was growing into a funeral march and a passionate melody in D minor. They drove through the suburbs. The carriage stumbled its way over the uneven cobbles, the open windows rattled furiously. "My little Elis is dead," said Gelfius to the noise, and though nobody could understand a word, Rassiem, who had been startled by

Dima's outburst, began to cry again. "Do you know, Rassiem, do you know why she died?"

"What?" shouted Rassiem through the racket, "No. I can't understand a thing like that."

"No," said Gelfius softly. "He doesn't know. I've been watching him closely; he doesn't know, he doesn't understand; he's lucky. He brings his wreath: *Rest in peace!* He weeps. My God, what are you crying for?" he shouted suddenly.

"She was so sweet," Rassiem sobbed unrestrainedly, and the tears poured down his cheeks. "I was as fond of her as if she'd been my own child. And now this horrible death. How did it happen, Gelfius? Did you see her again?"

The carriage, after shaking its way across the tramlines, drove on smoothly and quietly. Rassiem's shouting burst into the sudden silence like a runner who has overshot the tape. "Did you see her again?" he repeated softly and confidentially.

"She looked like a schoolgirl in her white dress. So small, so quiet, so content. The doctors say she had an easy death."

Rassiem pronounced an epilogue: "But why?" he asked, "why, why? She was of good family, wealthy, not untalented, pretty. Everybody liked her. And so young, so young! Perhaps because her voice wasn't much good? Was that the reason? No? What's the matter with you?"

Dima looked away from him at Gelfius's hands. "She died because of you, Hannes," she said very quietly.

"Because of—me? Me? What do you mean? What had I done to her? Me? I hardly knew her; I was always nice to her. But I never had anything to do with her, really I didn't. Such a child! Because of me!" he said and began to cry again. Slowly he comforted himself; slowly he grasped the facts. "So a girl has taken her life because of me. Because of unrequited love. How romantic. One sings

Tristan and up in one of the boxes a girl poisons herself. Why wasn't there anything in the papers? The scandal, eh? Of course, they want to avoid anything like that. That's why *Tristan* was chosen! And it was such a beautiful performance."

You tenor! thought Dima, smiling at him, at herself, and at everything that had happened. She laid her hand on Gelfius's shoulder that was shaking.

"It was such a beautiful performance; you were so good, you two," he said hoarsely. "What a pity that she didn't stay until the end."

"And what about you, Dima?" asked Rassiem in a changed voice. "Did you get a contract?"

"One year in Graz, to gain experience. After that at the Opera; oh, ye gods!" she said, clenching her fists and unable to suppress the joy in her voice.

"Here we are!" murmured Gelfius. Rassiem threw a quick glance in the wretched mirror at the back of the carriage and smoothed his hair. "Why, it's twelve o'clock; and the girls will all be tear-stained and in bad voice. Ah, well!"

The corridors were full of students; the walls resounded with voices of people, violins, and pianos; an organ purred deeply. Gelfius went up the steps, thinking, *How strange it all is. Elis is dead, so dainty and sweet and child-like, and dead. We were friends; but I loved you, Elis, my love, I loved you beyond words. The timetable pursues its normal course. I'm wearing black gloves. And the sun is shining. Tomorrow the Philharmonic are rehearsing my symphony. And then comes the string quartet; that's all that's left to me of Elis: a melody in D minor and a funeral march for the second movement, in which trumpets cry: to be alive is wonderful! One has one's work, one has one's work, one has oneself! I shall never see you again, Elis. And the timetable follows its normal course.*

Upstairs at the entrance to the corridor Dima was waiting and said, "Good luck, Gelfius. Farewell, Herr Kammersänger. I'm going to get my leaving-certificate. And then things will really begin to be nice. Then life will really begin. Thank you for all you've done. For everything."

"Good luck," he said hoarsely. *Something is taking leave of me that will never return again; farewell, sweet youth,* he thought and held her hand for a second longer.

Then the door into the school corridor was thrust open impetuously and Hannes Rassiem strode past her, with his long, stage strides and disappeared at the end of the corridor, where the last singing yellow gas jet burned, into the classroom.

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